

# Military Memoirs



**Alvan Markle III**  
(1918-2020)

The MILITARY MEMOIRS of Alvan Markle III  
(1918-2020)

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 1: PREPARATION</b>	<b>9</b>
The Fay School	9
The Hill School	10
Yale	10
The Old Army	11
<b>Chapter 2 - TRAINING</b>	<b>12</b>
Fort Bragg	12
Hot Tar & Heavy Guns	12
Hungry Prisoners	12
Fire Drills & Benmont	13
Fort Bragg Firing Range	13
Fort Sill	14
Fort Bragg - Spit & Polish	14
Tragic Gun Race	14
Looking for Trouble	15
Geronimo - Bluff #1	15
<b>Chapter 3: MARRIAGE</b>	<b>16</b>
Pinehurst & FMJ	16
Outshot!	16
Honeymoon	17

	3
Willie	17
Frances	18
<b>Chapter 4: ON THE MOVE</b>	<b>18</b>
Making Captain	18
The 266th Field Artillery (FA) Battalion at Camp Shelby	18
Finding a Home	19
Cappy	19
Mess Sargent (Sgt.) Orders Meat	19
Division Maneuvers & the Visiting General	20
Mississippi House on Fire	20
Stuck in Louisiana Mud	21
Fort Sill & Walters, OK. - Train Trouble	21
<b>Chapter 5: HEAVY ARTILLERY</b>	<b>21</b>
240mm Howitzers	21
At the Artillery Range	22
Personnel and Promotions	23
<b>Chapter 6: THE VOYAGE</b>	<b>23</b>
Departure	23
The Queen	24
Down into the Hold	24
A Very Fast Trip	25
<b>Chapter 7: ENGLAND</b>	<b>25</b>
Canford Cliffs	25
Miner's Lamp	26
Chemically Treated Fatigues	26
Trap Door	27
The L-4'S, Piper Cub over England	27

	4
<b>Chapter 8: THE INVASION</b>	<b>28</b>
A View of the Solent	28
Cut the Cables	29
C-Rations Migrate	29
French Farmer	30
Burp Gun	30
The Bocage and Hedgerows	30
Capture 2 Germans	30
Moved into Position with a High OP	31
Messerschmitt Disappears	31
<b>Chapter 9: OPERATION COBRA</b>	<b>32</b>
My Eyewitness Account	32
Friendly Fire Incident of July 24, 1944	33
What I Saw on July 25, 1944!	33
The Dust Cloud Moved	33
Annex A to Cpt. Markle's Cobra Account	34
The Danger of Bombers Flying Over GIs	34
The Carpet and the Errors on July 24th	34
Lt. Gen Jimmy Doolittle	35
The Real Culprit	35
Not Perpendicular, but Parallel	36
<b>Chapter 10: THE COUNTERATTACK AT MORTAIN</b>	<b>36</b>
Allies Sweep into France	36
The German Counterattack	37
The Falaise Gap	37
<b>Chapter 11: ON TO PARIS</b>	<b>38</b>
French Greetings	38



	5
Tragic Accident	38
Versailles & Camp de Satory	38
Afrika Korps Equipment	39
Parade and War	39
<b>Chapter 12: Held Up at the Roer</b>	<b>40</b>
Progress Halted	40
\$10,000 to Your Widow	41
Destruction of Aachen	41
Made Commander of Battery C	42
Firing on an Ammo Train, An Ideal Target	42
Visit by the Red Cross Clubmobile	43
Firing High at the Roer	44
Long Tom Stuck	45
AM III and the Pinehurst Outlook	45
Ramming the Projectile Out	46
<b>Chapter 13: THE HUERTGEN FOREST</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Explanation of the Journal Below</b>	<b>47</b>
Battery "C". ---- F.A. Group Provisional Battery. – 105mm HOW. (German)	51
Combat Lesson	55
Christmas Visitor 1944	56
Let Sleeping Dogs Lie	56
<b>Chapter 14: ARDENNES CAMPAIGN</b>	<b>56</b>
The Battle of the Bulge	56
Hearing of the Massacre of GIs at Malmedy	57
R & R and Skis in Liege	57
Our Reserve	58

	6
Night Marches - Blackout - Bridge at River Aisne	58
Snow Awakening	59
Fighting The Bulge	59
Good Bye Telephone Pole	60
I Capture 8 During the Bulge	61
<b>Chapter 15: Cologne Cathedral</b>	<b>61</b>
International Treasure	61
Souvenir Drilling	62
Ammo & Hot Tires on Fire	62
Positioning Heavy Artillery	63
Out Front with 240s & Germans Below Us	63
Awarded La Croix de Guerre	64
<b>Chapter 16: Crossing the Rhine</b>	<b>64</b>
The Bridge at Remagen - Bad Gotesburg	64
Surrender of German Battalion to Me	65
Leaving the Coal Mine	66
Horses Killed	67
Liberating a Champagne Factory	67
Depreciating an Asset	67
Buchenwald	68
<b>Chapter 17 VE Day</b>	<b>69</b>
Respite at Hotel Blocher	69
Money Laundering	69
3 Day Pass - Churchill	70
Visit to Compiegne	71
10 Months Under Fire	72
<b>Chapter 18 After VE Day</b>	<b>72</b>

	7
Provost Marshall & the French Master SGT with Ammo	72
The Duties of French Aspirant Officer Pegoff	73
Barge to Gravy Boat	74
Collection Points as Cigarettes	74
CPT Markle to Port Side	75
Battleship leaves Port	76
<b>Chapter 19 Reserves &amp; National Guard</b>	<b>77</b>
Joined the Reserves then the PA National Guard	77
Tuna Catch on Penobscot River	77
G-2 for the 28th Division in USA & Germany	78
The End for a Russian Spy	79
Bodo's Puppy Replacement	79
"My, that man looks familiar!"	80
AM III Gear and Maps Given to 1st City Troop	80
32 Moves in 8 years	81
Awarded Legion of Honor	81
Post Traumatic Stress	81
<b>Chapter 20 Conclusion</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Appendix #1 CPT Markle's Timeline</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Appendix #2 CPT Markle's Route Maps</b>	<b>85</b>

## INTRODUCTION

After some personal background, what follows are vignettes and short, true stories of my experiences in the military. They are arranged chronologically to the best I can recall. I hope you enjoy them. Although writing many of these in my 90's and finishing them at 101 11/12ths, I remember these events as if they occurred yesterday.

The Markles (then Merkels) were French Protestant Huguenots. They lived near Metz in Alsace under the protection of the Edict of Nantes. However, when it was revoked in 1685, such heretic Lutherans were mercilessly persecuted. Given the choice of becoming Catholics or immolation at the stake, the strongly religious Merkels fled across the Rhine to Lambsheim in Germany. There, young Johan Christian Merkel grew up, married, prospered, and sired two girls. Following the early death of his first wife, he went down the Rhine to Amsterdam and there married Jenina Wuertz, the sister of a Dutch Admiral. They emigrated to Pennsylvania early in the eighteenth century.

Christian (as he preferred to be known) and Jenina eventually settled in Moselem Springs, Pennsylvania, where he took title to 600 acres in 1732. His property eventually encompassed several thousand acres and included his original two-story stone cabin built over a spring, son Peter's stone house also built over a spring, son Christian's stone home and barn, and a large water-powered mill. All of these buildings, built in the Colonial period, survive to this day. Happily, much of this land is now well maintained by The Moselem Springs Golf Club.

Peter's son Ensign Christian Markle settled in Milton, Pennsylvania, on land granted for his Revolutionary War service, and his grandson, George Bushar Markle, grew up there. George and Ario Pardee, a pioneer operator of anthracite coal mines, married sisters. Ario asked George to come to Hazleton to

manage his company stores. He did this so well that he was given charge of Ario's mines. Given the opportunity to lease the rich Highland and Jeddo coal properties, George founded G. B. Markle & Co which was very successful because of his engineering inventions and innovations.

George and Emily Robison Markle had two daughters, Ida and Clara, and six sons. Ario, Howard, and William Clifford died young. Three: George II, John, and Alvan (my Grandfather), attended White Plains Military Academy, but were too young to serve in the Civil War. Alvan made Hazleton the economic center of Lower Luzerne County. He had a daughter, Emily, and four sons, three of which had military service in WWI: Alvan Jr. (my Father) as 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Air Service of the Signal Corps, Major Donald Markle as Supply Officer of the XX Infantry Division in France, and 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Eckley B. C. Markle as a flying officer in France. John II was too young to serve.

My forebears were people of strong character and exemplary principals. They were honorable, intelligent, diligent, creative, and generous.

## **Chapter 1: PREPARATION**

### **The Fay School**

Early on, I became an omnivorous rapid-reader. Two pages a minute. Each day I would draw two books from the Markle Memorial or my school Library and read one, cover to cover, as well as much of the other. This continued until I went to college. I gathered the meaning of new words from the context in which they were used.

At the age of eight I began five years at Fay School, a fine pre-prep boarding school in New England. There I learned enough Latin to understand the school motto POTERIS MODO VELIS (You can if you will) and the Markle SEMPER PARATUS

(Ever Ready). In an authoritarian age, Fay taught us to govern ourselves. Presenting a declamation to the entire faculty and student body at the age of ten introduced me to public speaking.

### **The Hill School**

Fay was followed by five years at The Hill School in Pennsylvania whose biblical motto was “Whatsoever things are true.” I did well in subjects I enjoyed and for which I had talent, but in others I “did not live up to my potential.” There I coped with bullying, earned a lot of National Rifle Association medals and ran the Book Shop profitably.

### **Yale**



I entered Yale in 1937. World War II had begun in Europe. Hitler had started his conquests. It seemed prudent to sign up for Military Science in the Reserve Officers Training Corps. The Yale unit, like those at Harvard and Princeton, prepared officers for Field Artillery commissions. After the disorganization of civilian life, I was impressed by the complete structure of the

Alvan Markle III - Yale Photo; other photos in this text are from the collection of Alvan Markle III.

military. A detailed field manual covered nearly every subject, and the ‘OFFICERS GUIDE’ answered most questions.



ROTC drill with French 75 mm howitzers

## **The Old Army**

This was the Old Army, boots and britches with wide brimmed campaign hats. But it was struggling to modernize. Equitation was still taught. However, the wooden wheels of our WWI French 75 mm howitzers had been replaced by bulging, pneumatic rubber tires, and the six-horse teams which originally drew them had given way to army trucks. The *Soixante Quinze* was still a formidable weapon.

At service practice at Fort Ethan Allen, we fired shrapnel: Lead balls like large buckshot blasted forward from a projectile in the air by a charge timed to devastate enemy troops below. In ignorance, the Press has long referred to shell fragments as shrapnel.

## **Chapter 2 - TRAINING**

### **Fort Bragg**

In 1941, I was commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Field Artillery Reserve and applied for active duty. Flunking the physical exam because I was nearsighted, I begged for a waiver, and on July 1<sup>st</sup> of that year reported to Battery B, 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Fifth Training Regiment of the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The mission was to build an army, and the Center provided thirteen weeks of basic training to 70,000 raw trainees at a time. Each of the sixteen battalions taught the use of one of the various weapons available. The Fourteenth had the *Grand Puissant, Filloux* (GPF), a 155mm French WWI long rifle which threw a 96 pound projectile 17,500 yards. It moved on solid rubber tires and was pulled by a full-tracked Caterpillar tractor.

### **Hot Tar & Heavy Guns**

On a hot summer day, I had to take a GPF to the ordnance shops on the Main Post and I rode beside my driver. At an intersection on a pristine, freshly-paved street, despite my protests, we were halted by an officious military policeman. While we waited, the hard tires of the GPF sank deep into the soft macadam. When he finally allowed us to move, the Cat skidded a bit, but easily pulled the gun out of the deep ruts, leaving a mess and a chagrined MP.

### **Hungry Prisoners**

I was indeed fortunate to serve with fine officers. Bill Bach commanded Battery B quietly and efficiently. Buhl Moore delegated well and backed his officers. Once when I was Officer of the Day, I marched a dozen prisoners to another battalion's mess hall where they were to be fed. They ate what was provided, but were still hungry. I told the mess sergeant that he was



drawing a full ration for each prisoner and ordered him to satisfy them. The next day, his battalion commander complained to the Regimental Commander that I had interfered with the operation of the mess. Fortunately, Col. Moore was there and defended me.

### **Fire Drills & Benmont**

In Battery B I made a life-long friend, Benjamin Montmorenci Tench, a gentleman of the Old South. I commanded the second platoon. Benmont commanded the fourth. Each platoon was quartered in a two-story wood cantonment with one stairway and a small railed platform at the end of the second floor with a ladder down to the ground. Fire was a major concern, and there were frequent drills which were timed from the sounding of the alarm to the moment when the men were lined up in ranks in the battery street. My platoon was usually best at 28 seconds, so I was amazed when Benmont reported just eleven! The crux of the drill was the single stairway provided for the 20 occupants of the second story, two of which carried a heavy extinguisher. The next drill I watched the fourth platoon. Benmont had reserved the stairway for just the extinguisher team. The 18 others ran one after another to the rear platform, vaulted the rail, dropped to the sandy ground, and rolled out of the way quickly because the next jumper was already in the air. With possible injuries in mind, I decided not to contest Benmont's time.

### **Fort Bragg Firing Range**

I was observing the training of the 14th FA Bn. at the Fort Bragg Firing Range. Twenty of my men were on the firing line in a prone position awaiting the order to fire at their respective targets 200 yards down range, when the Officer in Charge noticed a large doe walking onto the embankment which shielded the men raising the individual targets. He bellowed out the order "Don't shoot that deer." With that, a fusillade of shots rang out. The hospital served venison that night.

## **Fort Sill**

That fall I was ordered to the Field Artillery School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma to take the Battery Officers Course. The work was challenging, and I enjoyed every minute. I could visualize the trigonometry well and adjusted fire on my targets efficiently.

## **Fort Bragg - Spit & Polish**

Back at Fort Bragg, there were changes. Ambitious Major Goldspinner commanded the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and stubborn Lieutenant Lucas commanded Battery B. I became its Executive Officer in charge of the firing battery. Spit and polish reigned. When the 560 men assembled on the drill field for calisthenics and responded to "Dress Right" and "Open Ranks", there were slight variations in the ranks and the files because some of the men had longer arms than others. Major Goldspinner had surveyors pound small wood pegs in exact alignment. When each trainee stood with his peg between his heels, the result was almost perfect. Regrettably, there was no way that the Major could make all the men the same height.

One useful thing he did was to line up forty men in front of the podium, one behind the other, ten feet apart. They were instructed to obey whatever command they actually heard, but stand quiet if they could not hear. This enabled each junior officer to visualize exactly how far his command voice carried.

## **Tragic Gun Race**

As part of Field Day contests and games, Lt. Lucas proposed a race between the four gun sections in which their crews would push and pull their GPFs across the gun park by hand. These guns were so heavy and difficult to maneuver that they were always moved by powerful tractors. I pointed out the danger and thought I had talked him out of it. However, he was determined and later called for the race, saying he would judge the finish. I was at the starting line. The Chief of the Second Section was Sargent Salmon and his brother was the Gunner Corporal. I told

Corporal Salmon to ride on the gun-carriage and man the individual hand parking brakes on the rear wheels. There were several trainees pulling on the drawbar in front, another group pushing on the rear, and three or four on each side between the wheels. The race was started, and the guns were moving at a rapid pace when the Second Section stopped, and I heard the cry, "Medic, Medic." I ran to the gun and by its left side I saw Private Berzinski lying on the ground with his head crushed. It was obvious that he had been instantly killed. I later heard that the autopsy found his brains in his stomach. It appeared to me that as he pushed on the left side of the piece he leaned so far forward that the following wheel pinned him, and his head was run over. Contrary to my order, Corporal Salmon was on the ground where he could not reach the brakes. To my knowledge, there was no Court of Inquiry. Nor was there any investigation of what I believed was Reckless Endangerment.

### **Looking for Trouble**

Customarily, all officers on the post attended a party with their wives at the Fort Sill Officers' Club every Saturday night. At my first such function a ruckus broke out in the bar. Apparently one of my classmates had propositioned the wife of another who told her husband. That aggrieved officer undertook to rearrange the facial features of the miscreant with his fists. We broke up the fight and, as I had my Packard convertible there, I was delegated to drive him back to our Bachelor Officers' Quarters. On the way, I asked him why he had done such a dumb thing. "Oh" he said, "I proposition every attractive woman I meet." I asked if that didn't get him into a lot of trouble. "Yes" he admitted. "You have no idea how much trouble I've had." "Then why on earth do you do it?" With a big smile he explained "Every once in a while, one says "Yes."

### **Geronimo - Bluff #1**

On the artillery range west of the Post are four large round hills known as Medicine Bluff-1, MB-2, MB-3, and MB-4. Cache

Creek, flowing along their north side for many thousands of years, had eroded away that half of each bluff, leaving precipitous slopes. After the Civil War, displaced Native American tribes were in rebellion against a government which had treated them badly. Their Chief, Geronimo, pursued by a detachment of U. S. Cavalry, was cornered on the top of MB - 1. He rode down the face of that cliff, splashed through Cache Creek, and got away. Not one of the Cavalry dared to follow. What I saw from my horse, convinced me that what Geronimo did was an incredible inspiration, but few latter-day paratroopers were aware why they shouted "Geronimo" when they jumped.

## **Chapter 3: MARRIAGE**

### **Pinehurst & FMJ**

When we were teenagers, during spring break Father would take his three sons south for a week of golf. We had visited Pinehurst several times. Pinehurst is just thirty miles west of Fort Bragg, and naturally I gravitated to that resort in my free time. There I met Frances Margareta Johnston who wintered there with her parents in Cotton Cottage. She was an exceptionally bright young lady whose outgoing manner effortlessly made friends of all she met. Reddish glints in her brown hair attested to her Scotch-Irish heritage with limited patience and a short fuse. However, she never stayed mad and bore no grudges. Frances was a fearless fox-hunter and, according to Ripley, "the first woman to solo south of the Mason-Dixon line" flying Lloyd Yost's OX-5 WACO biplane.

### **Outshot!**

I was the best rifleman in my regiment, but shooting offhand she bested me. Her keen eyesight and exceptional coordination had made her a star pupil of the famous Annie Oakley. Frances had strong opinions, and there was never any doubt as to what they

were. We became engaged after five or six dates and married eleven days later in a full formal ceremony in the Pinehurst Village Chapel. That marriage survived the exigencies of the service and lasted 67 years.

### **Honeymoon**

We honeymooned at The Cloisters on Sea Island, Georgia. As our flight to that resort did not leave until the next morning, a thoughtful friend loaned us his cabin in the woods for our wedding night. We found it spectacularly festooned with bright yellow toilet paper and foolishly opened the impressive magnum of champagne left for us. We also discovered that twenty-two well-hidden alarm clocks had been set to go off in succession every twenty minutes all night long.

My one-week leave was blissful, but all too short. On our return, we were given the use of Cotton Cottage with Willie, the cook. Willie kept a butcher knife handy in case her husband showed up.

### **Willie**

Once Willie invited four of us to a service at her church in the nearby black community of Taylortown. The singing was glorious and the white-haired preacher most effective. Frequently, he would pause and tell the congregation to “Say Amen” or “Praise de Lord” and they would fervently reply in unison. When time came to take the Offering, we all had to go up to the front of the Church and place our contribution in a plate under the eyes of a row of deacons. Willie then announced that there had been a contest between those on the right side of the aisle and those on the left which had resulted in a tie. She said that there was going to be a second collection to break the tie which her side was going to win because “I know my white folks won’t let me down.” When later I complimented the Preacher on his sermon he explained “Fust I tells them what I’m gonna tell them.” “Then I tells them.” “And then I tells ‘em what I told them.”

## **Frances**

Frances was considerate and generous. She contributed to scores of worthy causes and actively participated in the work of a number of others, including Planned Parenthood, Children's Aid, and Inglis House (The former Philadelphia Home for Incurables). She gave a key tract of land to The Sandhills Area Land Trust to link habitats for the Red Cockaded Woodpecker. In later years, she was very active in The Colonial Dames in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Jephtha Abbot Chapter of the Daughters of the Revolution. Her Clubs included: The Acorn Club, Merion Cricket Club, Merion Golf Club, the Nantucket Yacht Club, and the Cosmopolitan Club.

## **Chapter 4: ON THE MOVE**

### **Making Captain**

In the year after our marriage, I was promoted to Captain and became the S- 2 of the 14<sup>th</sup> Bn. with staff responsibility for Intelligence and Counterintelligence. As military intelligence was not of major concern in a basic training situation, my work largely involved a lot of special duties including patriotism (Why We Fight) and morale (Entertainment). Whenever allowed, I carpooled from Fort Bragg to Pinehurst, always returning before Reveille.

### **The 266<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery (FA) Battalion at Camp Shelby**

On March 10, 1943 I was ordered to report to the 266<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, a new unit being formed at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, a large Post containing over 60,000 troops. It was expected that we would train and serve with it for the duration of the war. The nearest town was Hattiesburg with a population of 6,200. The crowding was dreadful, and everything was in short

supply. Although pregnant, Frances was determined to join me, and somehow, she secured a room in the only hotel, The Forest.

### **Finding a Home**

There were long lines for everything. Even hotel guests had to line up out in the street to enter the dining room. One day, when she had finally secured a table, she spotted an attractive couple in the line and invited them to join her. They told her that their outfit was moving out and that an apartment would be available at 2400 Hardy Street. The landlady, Mrs. Mathews, had rented every room in her large house, including the greenhouse and basement. The apartment, held up by shakey two-by-four timbers, was a single, screened room over a two-car, open carport with an outside stairway tacked on. Along one side were a 4' x 4' kitchenette, a 4' x 4' bath, and a 4' x 4' closet.

### **Cappy**

On May 24, 1943, Frances had our baby by C-section in the Biloxi hospital on the Gulf Coast, a hundred miles south of Shelby. She was given a large corner room on the second floor overlooking picturesque live oaks and the Gulf. Everything was fine until to her utter horror she spotted a cockroach on the wall. A pious Nursing Sister calmed her with assurances that, while there might be a few palmetto bugs on the ground floor, there were none above. She was obviously unaware that the diet kitchen down the hall was crawling with them. Frances was brought home to our tiny garage apartment with Nurse Calandra and an experienced black nanny who called me Captain and the baby-the Little Captain. To this day, he is still called Cappy. We lived happily in that tiny apartment until the battalion was sent to Louisiana Maneuvers and Frances went home to Pittsburgh with baby Cappy.

### **Mess Sargent (Sgt.) Orders Meat**

One day, I entered a Mess Hall and came up behind the Mess Sergeant who did not see me. I heard the Chef in the Kitchen

holler, "What should I do with the Meat for dinner tonight?" The Mess Sergeant snarled, "Cremate it, as usual."

### **Division Maneuvers & the Visiting General**

At Camp Shelby, I was ordered to conduct training exercises and tests for Battalions and Regiments. Much later, in 1951 I was made Maneuver Director for a three-day Division Exercise involving over 20,000 men! At the time I was only a Major. Normally, a General would have such duties. While that exercise was under way, the actual Corps Commander, a Lieutenant General, came into the Command Tent to observe. When I reported to him as the Officer in Charge, he was so surprised (and overweight) he nearly pushed over the center tent pole.

### **Mississippi House on Fire**

Once, after a field exercise, when I was leading the 135 man Headquarters (HQ) Battery back to camp along a rural dirt road, we came upon an old wooden farmhouse, the roof of which was blazing where it adjoined a crumbling brick chimney. The old farmer and his wife were struggling to extricate their furniture and possessions with little success. The nearest fire station was many miles away and they were about to lose everything. I halted the thirty-three vehicle column, and the first platoon soon emptied the house. There was a well in front, but it had only one bucket. However, many of the vehicles had axes and other tools strapped aboard and every one had a fire-extinguisher. Volunteers swarmed over that house like bees on a honeycomb. The burning shingles were quickly ripped off and the joists below soaked with extinguisher fluid. When the fire was completely out, the furnishings and goods were soon restored to their original places. Someone "passed the hat." All I had was a \$20 bill, so I had to set a good example. It bought a fortune in gratitude. All the old farmer could say was "A miracle, a miracle."



### **Stuck in Louisiana Mud**

My only memorable accomplishment in Louisiana was getting a four-wheel drive jeep, with chains on all four wheels, stuck in that state's black, gumbo mud. Happily, we were winched out by a six by six truck anchored to a big tree.

### **Fort Sill & Walters, OK. - Train Trouble**

Unexpectedly, I was called out of maneuvers and sent to Fort Sill for the New Unit Officer's Course, my third at The Artillery School. Frances wanted to join me there, but there were no quarters on the post, and Lawton was packed full. I finally rented half a small double house in Walters, Oklahoma, twenty miles away from the Post on an Indian reservation. She booked complex train reservations to Lawton and told me she and our baby would arrive from Oklahoma City at 3:25 pm. I promised to meet her and take her to Walters. I was at the station early, but when the train arrived she wasn't on it. Another train was scheduled to arrive before long, and I decided to wait. It was only then that I discovered that Lawton was served by two railroads, both of which had trains from Oklahoma City arriving at 3:25 PM! I was at the wrong station! I rushed to the other depot and there learned she had arrived and taken a bus to Walters. I loaded the bags she had been forced to leave and followed. Her entire trip had been harrowing. That mix-up proved the strength of our marriage. Nevertheless, to this day, I feel contrition whenever that episode comes to mind.

## **Chapter 5: HEAVY ARTILLERY**

### **240mm Howitzers**

The 266<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion was equipped with newly-designed 240mm (10" diameter) Howitzers from which 112 pounds of gunpowder threw a 360 pound high-explosive projectile up to 25,000 yards (14.2 miles) with amazing accuracy.

The tube weighed over 20 tons and was mounted on a 20 ton gun carriage. The sixty degree split between the opened trails provided a wide field of fire. Gun and carriage traveled on special wagons with huge rubber tires. Each was pulled by a full-track M10-A3 Tank Destroyer from which the turret had been removed. They were protected by an inch and a half of steel armor. They were powered by 500 horsepower airplane engines which could move the load at 35 miles per hour. The howitzer was dismounted and assembled by an 11-ton, truck-mounted commercial crane. Stability, the correct positioning of the crane in relation to the load, and where it was to be swung, were essential. If the leverage was too great, the crane would topple and the load would crash to the ground.

In daylight under favorable conditions, it generally took the seventeen-man gun crew four or five hours to emplace a howitzer, dig the large recoil pit, and position the auxiliary spades. Service of the piece was physically demanding and required mental concentration and coordination. Proper training was essential.

### **At the Artillery Range**

Once, I was sent with several other officers to a new camp in Alabama to test a 155mm howitzer battalion. At the observation post, I recognized the officer sent to adjust fire on a new base point as a former Sill classmate. We gave him a small farmhouse as his target. He made the calculations and telephoned his commands to the firing battery half a mile to our left rear. We heard "on the way" and shortly thereafter a 97 pound high-explosive shell burst on the front porch of the farmhouse. Shingles flew spectacularly. It was incredibly lucky for him to hit his target with his first shot. We expected that he would call it a "Target" hit. Instead, he said it was "Short" and began a conventional bracketing adjustment. In the bar of the Officer's Club that evening, I asked him why. He told me "My target was the house, but the shell landed on the front porch."

In the spring of 1944, the 266<sup>th</sup> was sent to Fort Bragg for final preparation. No one was sorry to see the last of Shelby. Frances and I were delighted to be in Pinehurst again.

### **Personnel and Promotions**

The 266th FA Bn CO, Lt. Col. Jones, was soon relieved, and competent Major Silas Gassett was given command. Fellow Yale alumnus, Major Stuart Ferris, was the Executive Officer and I became the S – 2. Subsequently, the S – 3 did not measure up, and I was assigned to that position with responsibility for Plans and Training. I planned and supervised the training of the Battalion and got it through its many tests. I hoped for the related promotion, but it was not to be. With combat in prospect, Captain York, an expert in fire direction from the Artillery School, was assigned S – 3, and I went back to S – 2. Then a problem arose in the Battalion headquarters, and I was assigned as the Commander of Headquarters and the 160 – man Headquarters Battery and Communications Officer.

It turned out that Captain York did not have all the required qualifications to go overseas as S – 3, so I nominally held that position until we got to England and he got the job back and the promotion.

## **Chapter 6: THE VOYAGE**

### **Departure**

When the 266th FA Bn got its orders to go to the European Theatre, we were at Camp Shelby, but first we went to Fort Bragg for several months of final preparation. We had to get our huge guns and their Prime Movers onto flat-bed rail cars which was very difficult. They had to be perfectly centered or the whole flatcar would tip. In fact, one of the tubes did come loose and angled off its railroad car, wiping out a train station as it passed. The trains took us to Fort Slocum. The next day the men and most of our equipment were put on lighters and transported

down the East River and up the Hudson to our ship, the Queen Elizabeth! Our heavy guns were to follow by freighter.

My wife, Frances, was determined to see me off, so she took a train from Southern Pines to New York, got a room at the Park Lane Hotel and awaited my call. I wangled an overnight pass, got into Manhattan, and found the Park Lane which was within walking distance of Grand Central Station. It was not easy to get back to Fort Slocum before Reveille at 5am.

### **The Queen**

Our Port of Embarkation was New York, specifically Fort Slocum on the East River. There, all our guns, prime movers, vehicles and other material were taken for shipment by freighter. The men were allowed to take only one duffle bag. Officers could add a small musette bag. I found that His Majesty, King George, had graciously sent his finest ship, the Queen Elizabeth, to take me, and twenty thousand others, to his United Kingdom. Most of these passengers were service troops. The major combat units had preceded us to be ready for D-Day. In consequence, the 266<sup>th</sup> Field was assigned to control of all the military. Of course, the British Navy ran the ship. We were taken on lighters down the East River, around Manhattan, and up the Hudson to the Elizabeth's berth. The Purser's Office became our headquarters, and our officers were billeted in relative comfort, six to a large stateroom.

### **Down into the Hold**

Later that day, lighters brought the rest of our passengers, and we had to put them in their assigned places in the holds. Embarked on the Sun Deck, we guided them down to the Boat Deck, the Promenade Deck, the Main Deck, A Deck, B Deck, C Deck, D Deck, E Deck, F Deck, and G Deck. Some realized that they were below the water line and were unlikely to get out if the ship took a torpedo. It took some persuasion to get them to their bunks. Each man had a heavy canvas hammock laced on a 2' by

6' pipe frame. These were stacked in four pairs on vertical uprights with two feet between and bags on the deck below the unit. It was really close quarters.

Two meals a day were served in 33 sittings. The first ran from 3:00 am to noon, and the second from 3:00 pm to midnight. The food was simple but good, and delicious fresh rolls helped fill the intervals.

### **A Very Fast Trip**

The Elizabeth was very fast and relied on her speed for security. She also had the newly-invented radar. No convoy for her. Three and a half days from New York to the Firth of Clyde. Checking blackout on the foredeck engendered an indescribable sensation of mass, power, and speed.

The Elizabeth had an older sister ship, the Queen Mary, which held the Atlantic speed record, the Blue Ribbon. The Elizabeth could easily have won it, but was not allowed to try, as long as the Dowager Queen Mary lived.

## **Chapter 7: ENGLAND**

### **Canford Cliffs**

We landed at Grenoch in Scotland and were taken by train to Canford Cliffs, a village on the south coast of England near Bournemouth. Officers were comfortably billeted in a large Victorian house which was Sir John Archer's summer home. There we spent several weeks awaiting the arrival of our freighted guns and vehicles. The locals were friendly, but with reservations. We were considered "the Friendly Occupying Power" and our troops "Over Paid, Over Sexed, and Over Here".

Our Battalion Surgeon, "Doc Bones," set up his Aid Station on the main street. Few soldiers came to Sick Call, and he and his men had little to do. Finding the townspeople underserved, he opened his clinic to all comers, gratis, which was much appreciated.

However, the Brits did object to the Red Cross on the banner he hung outside, fearing it would attract German Bombs. “The Blitz, you know.”

During the Battle for Britain a few Polish refugees were trained as pilots and flew with the Royal Air Force. In a BBC interview, one excitable pilot vividly described his aerial combat, “There was a Folker below me, another Folker behind me, and one in front.” With that, the very proper BBC Interviewer seized the microphone and interjected, “I think I should explain: A Folker is a type of German aircraft.” The Pole recovered the mike and shouted “Ja, Ja, and every vun of dem Folkers vas Messerschmits.”

We were not happy to be welcomed to England by Axis Sally on her nightly propaganda radio broadcast. She had a wide regular audience who were often surprised to hear how much the Germans knew about our troop dispositions.

### **Miner’s Lamp**

Raised in the coal town of Hazleton, PA by a family with mining interests, it was natural to obtain a miner’s lamp for use during the war. The half-gallon can of carbide I brought lasted for years, and it produced a brighter light than a flashlight. When carbide combines with water, it creates a flammable gas that can be ignited by a spark. I’d drop some granules of carbide onto the bottom of the lamp. Gas would form as water dripped into that chamber which would come out the ceramic nozzle. I’d cup the gas in my hand and simultaneously, spin the igniter against the flint. The spark would ignite the gas creating a bright long-lasting light which could be controlled by adjusting the water drops. I have given this lamp to my son.

### **Chemically Treated Fatigues**

In England, shortly before the Invasion, we were issued camouflage-design fatigue uniforms that had been dipped in a special solution for Chemical Warfare protection. After all, the

Germans had used gas before. The fatigues were hot and sticky. We could not get out of them fast enough! After the breakout, we wore olive drab wool slacks and shirts with matching short Eisenhower jackets. Parachute nylon neckerchiefs were easily washed out.

### **Trap Door**

The camouflage colored fatigue uniforms in WWII were one piece, which made using the latrine awkward and uncomfortable, especially in inclement weather.

So, I had a tailor put in a zipper that went straight up along one pocket, across the back and down the other to create a “Trap Door”. It was much easier to use the latrine thereafter without having to remove the fatigues and the Field Jacket on top of them.

### **The L-4's, Piper Cub over England**

Many think that heavy artillery battalions in combat are positioned far to the rear where they are relatively safe. Of course, this is wrong. Standard tactics require that they be placed as far forward as possible to take advantage of their long range and ability to reach deep into enemy territory. Because their distant cannot be seen observation were each Piper Cub pilots were of the brave, Among them Lieutenants Rovery. Two waiting for us



targets often from ground posts, these units issued two L-4 planes whose either the bravest or utter madmen. were ours: Langley and L-4's were when we arrived

Lt.Rovery poses in front of his L-4 Piper Cub



in England, and our pilots were eager to fly. Every flight had to have a purpose, and I was often the justification. Reichsmarschall Goring's night bombers had pounded London, Coventry, and many other industrial centers unmercifully, Rovey flew me over the south of England to witness the damage. Admittedly, much of the time was spent on sight-seeing. We circled beautiful Salisbury Cathedral. We viewed Stonehenge, as few have seen it. We admired the rural countryside. Ahead was a grassy hill with a haystack on top. "I'm going to roll my wheels on that mound" he said, and down we went. Just before we reached it, the stack split open and disclosed an anti-aircraft battery with its crew tracking us. It was a Quad Bofors weapon with four 37mm rapid firing cannons mounted together. Rovey pulled up hard, and we passed a few feet over it. Aimed right at us, those 37mm barrels looked huge. They had every reason to blast us in self-defense. I don't know why they didn't, but I am eternally grateful to the British crew who in that instant decided not to shoot down those crazy Americans.

## **Chapter 8: THE INVASION**

### **A View of the Solent**

Canford Cliffs overlooked the Solent, a large body of water between the mainland and the Isle of Wight with Southampton at its eastern end. The village was on high ground roughly seventy meters above the water. The precipitous slope down to the beach below was broken by several chimes – steep ravines with rough paths. From the top, we had an uninterrupted view of the central Solent.

In the afternoon of June 5<sup>th</sup>, we noticed increasing activity. Gray naval ships of all types began to appear. Battleships, cruisers, destroyers, minesweepers, and other vessels gathered beyond our feet. Then strings of LST (Landing Ship Tank, or Large Slow Target) and smaller LSI (Landing Ship Infantry) crawled into view. Hundreds and hundreds. The traffic grew so dense that the



Brits likened it to Piccadilly Circus in the heart of London. The scene was literally awe-inspiring. When we looked there early the next morning, they were all gone. The Invasion of German-occupied France had begun.

### **Cut the Cables**

With so much massive naval fire support available, heavy field artillery had low priority and storms delayed the build-up. It was weeks before we were ordered into the Southampton marshaling area. For three days, we played bridge in pyramidal tents and watched the Barrage Balloons sway on their long cables while the rain poured down. One bitter officer wondered, "If they cut the cables would the bloody island sink?"

### **C-Rations Migrate**

In spite of severe storm damage to the Mulberry harbour at Omaha Beach in Normandy on June 19, 1944, a pier had been sufficiently repaired by July 5, 1944 for us to drive our equipment and howitzers off the ship and onto the pier and to the shore.

We had crossed the Channel on a cargo ship with our vehicles in the hold where cases of C-Rations were also carried. Somehow, a lot of those cases migrated into our vehicles, and my men never went hungry.

When we landed on Omaha Beach, it was not under fire and a floating dock had been constructed. We drove off with dry feet and went to an assigned assembly area. That evening at dusk a German plane made a bed-check run the length of the beachhead. Scores of our weapons opened fire, and the tracers made a spectacular, but ineffective, display. One of my men was blazing away with a jeep-mounted 50 caliber machine gun at an enemy gone far out of range. I politely asked him what he was shooting at, and he told me "A P-40" (One of ours) He received appropriate individual tutoring.

### **French Farmer**

We landed on Omaha Beach, off-loading to a repaired “Mulberry” on 7/5/1944 with the big 240mms on Day 29 of the invasion. Not everyone welcomed us. As the Battalion, with howitzers, trucks, jeeps, other vehicles and troops, moved inland, I came upon a French farmer who was very unhappy that we were occupying his property. Actually, on neighboring land our engineers cut down an entire orchard to make a runway with interlocking steel plates to further our air superiority. We had no way to distinguish invaluable members of the Resistance from insidious Collaborateurs.

### **Burp Gun**

I made a camo neckerchief of parachute silk and found it much easier to wash than the whole shirt. I also picked up a Schmeiser automatic rifle, a technical marvel that fired 600 rounds a minute- so fast it was called a “Burp Gun.” An experienced soldier advised me that, if I fired it, every American within earshot would recognize it as German and zero in on me. I ditched it fast and picked up an American M-1.

### **The Bocage and Hedgerows**

Much of Normandy was the Bocage - small fields separated by hedgerows. A lot of the rest was swampland. The green hedgerows were composed of stones taken from the small fields and placed on their boundaries, entwined with vines and the roots of small trees. Over four feet high, they formed a formidable barrier and gave excellent defensive protection.

### **Capture 2 Germans**

While reconnoitering for a new battery position in the bocage with my driver and my radio operator, one told me that there were German soldiers on the other side of a nearby hedgerow, and I glimpsed two young ones. It was suggested that we toss a grenade over to them. I thought that a bit untidy and, directing

them to cover me, jumped the hedgerow farther down and approached the spot where they were seen with my 45 drawn and cocked. I found two teenage conscripts hiding under a camouflage sheet and roused them out. They had abandoned their weapons and had not eaten for three days. We fed them and dropped them off at a PW Collection Point to spend the rest of the war in safety.

### **Moved into Position with a High OP**

On July 16<sup>th</sup>, I moved headquarters to a small wooded area near the village of St. André de Bohun, roughly in the center of the American sector. It was just north of a large swamp and south of hedgerows where the Germans had constructed an observation platform on top of a tall pine tree with board slats all the way up. This Observation Post (OP) was much higher than anything else in the beach-head and provided unobstructed views in all directions. Officers came from higher headquarters to take in lunch and the aerial dog fights over our battery. These acrobatics occurred almost daily.

### **Messerschmitt Disappears**

During one particular dog fight above our position at St. André de Bohun, we saw a German Messerschmitt fighter get shot down and plummet straight into the swamp only a couple of hundred yards from where we were standing. Several of us walked over on the dried surface. However, when we reached the site, there was no trace of the plane! It had been swallowed up whole by the swamp - nothing, nothing but a black pool surrounded by vegetation!

## Chapter 9: OPERATION COBRA

### My Eyewitness Account

The following is my contemporary eyewitness account of Operation Cobra, the breakout from the Normandy Beachhead during World War II.

However, first you might like to watch the talk I gave with my son on June 7, 2019, on board the Seven Seas Navigator as part of my family's trip to witness the 75th Anniversary of D-Day. The video can be viewed [here](#). Or type in the following URL.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/urhoteob1frxdj7/8th%20lecture%20Cobra....mp4?dl=0>

In 1944, I was a Field Artillery Captain commanding Headquarters Battery of the 266<sup>th</sup> FA Battalion, a separate unit assigned to the First United States Army. We were armed with six 240mm howitzers from which 112 pounds of gunpowder cast a 260 pound high-explosive projectile up to fifteen miles with deadly accuracy and devastating effect. After the D-day landings, the Allies' progress was slow because of the extensive swamps and many stubbornly-defended hedgerows which delineated the boundaries of small fields. These were formed of stones, dirt, vines, roots, bushes and small trees several feet thick and roughly four or five feet high. They provided the Germans with ready-made fortifications throughout a large area known as the Bocage. On a Division situation map, I noted a range of low hills just south of The Bocage on which the enemy had prepared mortar pits, machine gun nests, dug-in tanks, and other weapons. I wondered how these formidable defenses could be breached. General Omar Bradley's solution was Operation Cobra. We were told that it involved saturation bombing of a square mile, but had no idea where or when it would come.

### **Friendly Fire Incident of July 24, 1944**

We were unaware of the weather-aborted, high-altitude perpendicular bombing on July 24<sup>th</sup> although the planes probably passed high over us. However, the fact that they had inflicted severe casualties on our front-line troops soon became widely known through informal grapevine communication.

### **What I Saw on July 25, 1944!**

On the next day, July 25<sup>th</sup>, I was on the high observation platform with my radio operator, Sgt. Elvio Darin. The weather was clear, cool, and calm.

At about ten o'clock that morning I was amazed to see a long single file of our bombers approaching from the north at a low altitude. They passed, one after another, about six miles east of us, headed south toward St. Lo. When each plane reached the hills, it turned right, westward, and dropped its bombs along the length of the target area on the hills parallel to the St. Lo - Perrier highway.

Most of the bombers were medium B25s and B26s, but there were some heavy B24s. Unfortunately, the enemy had emplaced 88 mm high-velocity anti-aircraft guns behind the hills. Our low-flying planes in single file were an easy target, and I saw dozens of the medium B25s and B26s shot down. The heavies were more resilient and, although some were hit, they kept flying.

### **The Dust Cloud Moved**

The smoke and dust from thousands of bombs soon created a large dense dark cloud which hid all landmarks and obliterated markers. I could no longer see the hills. The bombing continued for almost two hours, and the pilots of the later planes could not see the ground. But the cloud was obvious and they confidently dropped their bombs into it. No one was aware that an imperceptible breeze from the south had gradually moved the dust cloud north over our infantry which was waiting to attack

from the line of departure. Again, our troops suffered heavy casualties, despite the fact that this time the Air Force had courageously complied with the parallel approach requested by General Bradley.

I hereby attest to the truth of the foregoing account of my clear recollections which contradict the assumption, published by others, that the casualties on July 25<sup>th</sup> were the result of the Air Force's stubborn insistence on the safer high-altitude perpendicular approach. My explanation follows as Annex A.

## **Annex A to Cpt. Markle's Cobra Account**

### **The Danger of Bombers Flying Over GIs**

In planning Operation Cobra, General Bradley was aware of the longitudinal inaccuracy of aerial bombardment. Standard practice was designed for strategic bombing. It required the planes to fly in close formation directly to the target in daylight at an altitude of 30,000 feet, drop their bombs, wheel, and fly home. At 180 miles per hour, a one-minute error would move the point of impact three miles. The D-Day support had been ineffective because delayed releases dropped our bombs far behind the German defenses.

### **The Carpet and the Errors on July 24<sup>th</sup>**

The target for Cobra was a rectangle 3 1/2 miles wide (East – West) by 1 1/2 mile deep (North – South). To protect our troops, Bradley asked that the planes fly from east to west, the length of the target, parallel to the St. Lo – Perrier highway. However, Air Marshall Leigh-Mallory, General Eisenhower's Deputy for Air, required the standard high-altitude approach perpendicular to the target because our forces were trained only for that. He then left the meeting early to fly back to England, and his plan was initiated on June 24<sup>th</sup>.

While our bombers were enroute, the weather turned worse, and it was decided to abort the mission and recall the planes.

Unfortunately, the leading 400 bombers were already beyond radio range, failed to get the message, continued to the target, and dropped their bombs too soon, killing 25 Americans and wounding 131. Word of this accident quickly spread. However, faced with a long delay for revision, Bradley was forced to concede, and Leigh Mallory's perpendicular plan was accepted.

### **Lt. Gen Jimmy Doolittle**

The Eighth Air force was commanded by Lt. Gen James Harold Doolittle. Jimmy Doolittle was the national hero who led the bombing of Tokyo to retaliate for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. For this, he was awarded the Medal of Honor. In a career marked by radical improvement of tactics and effective results, he was recognized by two Distinguished Service Medals, the Silver Star, three Distinguished Flying Crosses, the Bronze Star, four Air Medals, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, many foreign decorations, and eleven campaign awards. Successful missions brought promotion to Lt. General in March 1944 and command of the Eighth Air force in January 1945.

Certainly, Jimmy Doolittle would not want to repeat Leigh Mallory's friendly-fire disaster. I believe that when Doolittle learned of the casualties on the 24<sup>th</sup>, he took it upon himself to order his pilots to comply with the low-altitude parallel approach requested by General Bradley which I witnessed on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Only he had the authority, stature, and independence to do so.

### **The Real Culprit**

As 11,000 bombs per square mile were dropped on the target box, all landmarks and warning signs became obscured by a dense mass of smoke, dust and debris. The pilots of the later flights could not see the ground, but this cloud was obvious, and they confidently dropped their loads into it. Unfortunately, an imperceptible breeze had moved the cloud north over our troops. The later flights assumed that it was still over the target and

dropped their bombs into it. The resulting friendly fire killed 111 and wounded 490.

### **Not Perpendicular, but Parallel**

Many historians have assumed that these additional casualties were the result of stubborn insistence on the same perpendicular approach that caused the earlier disaster. In fact, with great courage and considerable sacrifice, the Eighth Air Force actually adopted General Bradley's parallel course, the benefit of which was negated by a natural effect.

Despite this second disaster, Operation Cobra proved to be an outstanding success. The enemy was demoralized, and General Collins' VII Corps broke out of the beachhead. Cobra was the key victory that enabled the liberation of France.

As we followed the VII Corps out across the "Carpet" in the Normandy Breakout, one could not but notice St. Lo was flattened except for some chimneys still standing. In the target itself, every square yard was marked by a bomb crater.

This account contradicts Ernie Pyle's version in his book, *Brave Men*, in which on page 208 he states, "They (the Heavies) came from directly behind us." Then later on that page he adds, "The first huge flight passed directly overhead and others followed."

## **Chapter 10: THE COUNTERATTACK AT MORTAIN**

### **Allies Sweep into France**

Following the First Army's breakout, the First Army units poured through the gap with little opposition, followed by General Patton's Third Army which started a wide fast-moving sweep eastward across Maine, while the First Army swung eastward past Argentan. As it turned out, the 266 FA Bn was usually selected by VII Corps Commander, "Lighting Joe" Collins,



General Bradley's right arm of his First Army, to be his main artillery unit. Gen. Bradley had selected VII Corps to lead the breakout in Operation Cobra. The First Army was the first army ashore on the Normandy Beaches on D-Day, June 6, 1944 (Omaha). At this point they did not know they would be the first into Paris on August 25, 1944; the first into Germany on Sept 11, 1944, the first to cross the Rhine River on March 7, 1945, and the first to link up with the Russians on the Elbe on April 15, 1945 - 700 miles from Normandy.

### **The German Counterattack**

On August 7<sup>th</sup> 1944, the German 47<sup>th</sup> Panzer Corps attacked westward behind our armies toward Avranches on the coast. If successful, this would have cut off all supplies to the major U.S. forces which were already running short on gasoline and ammunition. Few reserves were available to stop this dangerous onslaught, so Bradley mustered all the artillery he had and asked for close support from the allied air services. The fighting was so intense that the roads were littered with shell fragments, and we had many flat tires. Thanks largely to British Typhoons and American P-47's, this counterattack was checked at Mortain, only nine miles from its objective.

### **The Falaise Gap**

A double envelopment, or pincers operation, is the classic way to destroy or capture an enemy force, but, as it brings two friendly units face to face, careful planning and tight control are essential to avoid casualties. When the German counterattack failed at Mortain, the remaining panzers retreated east on the choked-up Vier - Falaise highway. It was an exceptional opportunity to capture Hitler's best units. Field Marshall Montgomery selected Falaise as the point on the north side where the trap was to close. On the south side, General Bradley reached his line on schedule. There, we were barred from further advance, and even from firing on the road on which the Germans were escaping. Unfortunately, Montgomery's forces were unable to advance to

Falaise, and many panzers escaped to trouble us later with their Ardennes penetration.

## **Chapter 11: ON TO PARIS**

### **French Greetings**

As our convoys rolled through France, many French people lined the roadsides, cheering, waving flags, and offering fruit and cider. Most of our vehicles carried names painted on by their drivers. Seeing them, the French would cry “Vive MARY ANN” or “Vive SUSIE,” or even more enthusiastically “Vive YVONNE” or “Vive MARIE.” But the name that got the most applause was “PRESTONE.” When a radiator had been charged with antifreeze, its name was stenciled in bold letters across the front of the vehicle. The Prestone brand got a lot of free publicity.

### **Tragic Accident**

Traffic was heavy, and convoys followed each other closely on the way to Versailles. Leading mine, I noticed in a column of 6 x 6 trucks ahead a sergeant tossing candy bars to the children along the road. One fell on the highway and a small boy dashed out to grab it. As he rose with the candy in his hand, his head was struck by the body of the following 6 x 6 and knocked him down. His father ran between the trucks, grabbed the boy by the arm, and swung him off the road. I halted my convoy, got out of my jeep, and saw that he had been killed. I covered him, wrote my name, rank, serial number, and unit on a page from my notebook, and gave it to the family with the briefest of condolences. I had to go on. I thought there might be an inquiry and some recompense, but heard nothing further.

### **Versailles & Camp de Satory**

Our next stop was Versailles. We camped in a small park on the hill above the town for three days and thought we were in heaven. The French/German military Camp de Satory was just

beyond, and we re-equipped. The soles of our boots were worn through, but the local shoemaker had no leather. Liberated saddles from the Franco – Prussian War met the need. I acquired a horsehair saddle-blanket which effectively prevented ground moisture from wicking up into my bedding roll.

## Afrika Korps Equipment



Water had always been a problem, and was often rationed to one canteen per man, per day. The 5-gallon Jerry-cans were a backbreaking nuisance, but the Afrika Korps left us a

A Building in Paris

large water tank with three spigots. It fitted perfectly into a one-ton trailer. When emptied, a weapons carrier towed it to the nearest water-point, which quickly poured it full. We reveled in plenty the rest of the war. We also acquired some small trailers that the Germans had made to carry flame-thrower fuel. They conveniently carried the bedding rolls and barracks bags which did not fit in a Jeep. I went through the magnificent Palace of Versailles, which fortuitously was undamaged. LTC. Stewart Ferris and I drove into Paris, enjoyed an excellent meal at a fine restaurant, and shared a bottle of celebratory champagne with two attractive French girls. After eight weeks of combat, Versailles was a most welcome relief.

## Parade and War

We followed the 28th Division's parade through Paris. We did not remain and celebrate. We were continuing on to war.



A Parade in Paris

## Chapter 12: Held Up at the Roer

### Progress Halted

My battalion with the VII Corps rapidly crossed Northern France, and Belgium, pounded the Siegfried line, and entered Germany below Aachen. In September 1944, the advance of the American armies was stopped at the heavily-defended Roer River. Every crossing attempt was frustrated by massive waves released from the Schwamemel dams upstream which swept away all boats and bridging attempts. Our only access to these dams was through the bitterly-contested Huertgen Forest. The 9<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Divisions were badly mauled in the rugged woods and made little progress.



## **\$10,000 to Your Widow**

On one occasion, a German plane flew overhead and dropped thousands of propaganda leaflets, but this time it was a check #13, dated 25 February, 1944, made out to "Your Widow" for \$10,000.00 drawn on the Philadelphia National Bank and supposedly signed by the Adjutant General of the US War Department. Since my father, Alvan Markle Jr., was a banker, I sent it to him. He then sent it to a friend at the Philadelphia National Bank who in turn gave it to a reporter at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. They ran a story about it under the headline, "Goebbel's Latest Gag, Just Another Phony."

## **Destruction of Aachen**

On September 13, 1944, we were sent from Walhorn, Belgium all the way towards Breinig Germany. Originally, the 266th passed south of Aachen, as we moved east towards Germany. We were



One of our 240mm howitzers

emplaced near Breinig, Germany, just west of the Huertgen Forest, when after 2 days we got orders to turn our guns about 150 degrees, and fire back into Aachen. This was a big battle, which lasted from October 2 until October 21, 1944. The Germans defended it stubbornly because centuries before it was Aix-la-Chapelle, the capital of the Holy Roman Empire. When Aachen was flattened, we aimed east again. Here C Battery was shelled by high-velocity 88s with serious casualties. The Battery Commander, CPT Neeley, became demoralized and, with the men paralysed in their foxholes, the battery became ineffective. He was relieved, and I was ordered to replace him. Transferred with me were my Radio Operator, Sgt Elvio Darin, and driver, Corporal Melvin Cummings.

## **Made Commander of Battery C**

After I was made CO of the firing battery of 240s, we got the men



Another of our 240 mm Howitzers

out of their fox-holes and finished sandbagging the guns. I set up the mess (food service) in a quarry where it was sheltered, and the carpenter found some lumber and built a roofed structure with gravel to stand on and shelves to hold their mess-kits while they stood to eat. We served two hot meals a day. Morale improved as we fired more missions.

### **Firing on an Ammo Train, An Ideal Target**

Although our big guns were located at Brenig, Germany, my forward observer, 1st Lt. Spivey, was a few miles away near Stolberg, Germany in the attic of a house along the Roer River peering out of a small opening where he had removed some shingles. From there he saw a German train running across his view about 12 miles away. They obviously thought they were out of range, but not from the 240mms which had a range of 25,000 yards – almost 15 miles! Spivey called in a shot in front of the

train which hit the tracks and stopped it. The next round landed on the tracks behind it, whereupon we worked it over. It turned out to be carrying ammunition which exploded in spectacular fashion!

From this same location in Brenig, the 266th FA Bn was the first unit to fire on the German Railway Center at Duren, which was halfway to the Rhine. A reporter, who happened to visit our battery at the time, wrote that every time one of our big howitzers fired, all the cows in the adjoining fields jumped at once and all the wash hanging on the line at the nearby farm hung out straight away from the concussion.

### **Visit by the Red Cross Clubmobile**

Not much later, we were visited by a Red Cross Clubmobile. They usually went to infantry units, but when this was not possible, they dropped in on us. Turning off the main road, they drove about 150 yards back to the small farmhouse where my command post was in the basement with access by outside cement stairs. Two attractive American girls parked their box-truck there and began to hand out coffee and doughnuts to my men who gathered quickly. Morale soared. Then -- Boom, Boom, Boom, Boom -- a German artillery salvo landed down by the main road.



A Red Cross Clubmobile

Ignoring my order to take cover, the girls went right on serving coffee, doughnuts, with banter. Then--Boom, Boom, Boom--we heard another salvo far to our rear. "See" they said, "Not to worry" and went on passing out the coffee and doughnuts.

Then--Boom, Boom, Boom, Boom--four more rounds came in about a hundred yards to our rear. They had us in a tight bracket. The next morning, the 1st. SGT said to me, "Captain, the men are wondering how you got down those cellar steps so fast, with a Red Cross girl under each arm?"

### **Firing High at the Roer**

The far bank of the Roer River was lined with large brick factory buildings. The Germans placed machine guns, not at the windows, but back in the building firing through the windows at angles so that their beaten zones crossed to cover all approaches. Our army's shells hit only their front walls, while they hid safe in the basements. To counter this, we fired our howitzers at high trajectories with delay fuses to drop through the roof and explode in the basement. It was backbreaking work to lower the barrel to



load, raise it high to fire, and bring it down repeatedly, with unknown effect. The Germans held the Roer line until after the Ardennes campaign began. Then we were rushed many miles to Durbuy, Belgium to get in front of The Bulge to try to stop it.

### **Long Tom Stuck**



A crane ready to remove a tube

Another Battery near us at Brenig had 155mm Long Tom rifles. These 6" rifles had a much smaller diameter than our 240s, but had very long barrels for range. One of their weapons

had a problem and was being taken to Ordnance. It had 8 rubber wheels pulled by a 7.5 ton-Mack Prime Mover. However, it was so muddy that the truck just spun its wheels until its bottom was flat on the ground.

They asked for our help, so we sent a full tracked M-4 Prime Mover to assist. But when the M-4 started to pull on the front of the Mack truck, the gun and the truck were so stuck that the M-4 Prime Mover merely raised up its nose in the air. We then attached one of our twenty ton M-10, tracked Tank destroyers to the front of the Prime Mover. That did the trick.

Further up, the Long Tom slid off a steep, narrow, muddy road, and they tried to lift it back on with the digging bucket on a crane. Such buckets have a very weak grip. I saw it in time to advert disaster, rigged a suitable sling, and sent them on their way.

### **AM III and the Pinehurst Outlook**

Several of the stories that I wrote to my wife she passed along to the local paper, the *Pinehurst Outlook*. In one missive I

acknowledged receipt of her “...package (of cans) of caviar, lobster, clam soup, brownies n’sstuff.” True story!

It also reported that, “I got a letter from the Secretary of War today. Seems one of my men neglected to write to his wife frequently, so I received an Order from the Secretary of War, ‘This soldier will be advised to conduct his correspondence in such a manner that it will not become the subject of official communications.’” He was so advised.

On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944, I’d written, “ A quickie tonight as I am going to bathe and do so in a canvas basin. It is an evening’s job. The water is ‘heating’ on a little coal stove which doesn’t do too well on the black cinders and slate which passes for coal in this part of the world.”

### **Ramming the Projectile Out**

My gun-crews each had seventeen men, but with experience I found that we could fire at night with only half a crew, while the other half slept. It took a bit longer, but enabled us to interdict roads at all hours and deprive the enemy of sleep.

One night, I was awakened by the Chief of Section of the Number 1 howitzer. Something was wrong, and he needed direction. I threw on some warm clothes and went to the piece with a flashlight. He told me in



A 240 mm in Brenig, Germany where I shoved the projectile out

AM III Shoved the projectile out

fire-mission, the projectile had failed to seat properly. I soon saw that it had half an inch of ice near the base, which had kept it from entering the forcing cone where the soft copper rotating band on the projectile would engage the lands and grooves in the barrel. The tarpaulin covering the ready rounds nearby was short

and had left the bottom part of the projectiles exposed to a buildup of sleet and ice.

At Fort Bragg back in 1941, I had learned something pertinent. In a sister 240mm battalion, a trainee gun crew failed to ram a projectile properly, and when the piece was elevated to fire, it slid back onto the powder-bags. When the gun was fired with 112 pounds of gunpowder, the round fishtailed out the barrel, making a deep gouge on alternate sides every few feet and leaving an eleven-foot crack two inches wide. I knew firing now would destroy my howitzer.

The powder bags had not been inserted. I had the crew put a pile of rags in the chamber as a cushion, close the breach and elevate the piece, but the projectile did not drop. We found a ten-foot ladder in a nearby barn, and I climbed it with a long bell-rammer while the gun-crew took cover. We had no 240mm rammers and the 155mm diameter of the rammer was a good deal smaller than that of the barrel, so instead of striking the shell directly on its body, it first slid along the fuze. Holding on with one hand, I pulled the rammer back with the other and hammered the 360 pound high-explosive projectile three times with no effect. Thankfully, on my fourth attempt the round broke loose and slid down into the powder chamber. The crew cleaned it and the gun very, very carefully and resumed the fire-mission. Later, I awarded the Chief of Section the Bronze Star.

## **Chapter 13: THE HUERTGEN FOREST**

### **Explanation of the Journal Below**

Ordnance was running short on 240mm ammunition, and I was given six German 105mm howitzers with unlimited ammunition and orders to emplace them in the bitterly-contested Huertgen Forest. Our sights were fitted to aim direction, but we had to use gunner's quadrants on the tube to lay their range.

As the 266th FA Bn supported the fight for Aachen and the troops in the Huertgen Forest, ammunition became scarce for our 240mm big howitzers as we tried to economize. How stupid was



Photo of a German 105 howitzer

it for the Defense Department to spend a fortune on these howitzers and their troops, which could inflict such tremendous damage, and not procure enough ammunition to fully

utilize them? Therefore, two “Provisional Batteries” were formed with German 105 howitzers and I was given the command of one of them around Dec. 4, 1944. We started with four guns, but soon had six. We had unlimited captured ammo and were kept busy. Artillery requires an open field of fire. Dense woods are impossible as they intercept all fire. I reconnoitered thoroughly. The only possibility was adjacent to several large fields a mile or two south of the Village of Huertgen. A foot of snow covered the frozen bodies of those who had fought there.

We had to constantly deal with mines, suffering some injuries. On one occasion on December 14, 1944, 13 big Reigal anti-tank mines that the Engineers had cleared were left in piles beside the road where a passing Diamond T 4 ton truck entangled them in trailing barbed wire and dragged several under the tires. This resulted in a huge explosion. This occurred near the field where my Motor Officer lost his foot to an anti-personnel mine when we were reconnoitered there earlier.

On December 11, 1944 when I got 1st. Lt Dewey E. Waldrop to an Aid Station in the village, the Schu Mine had blown off his foot so neatly that the Surgeon there accused me of operating on it. All I had done was to improvise a tourniquet with a shoelace.

The #3 gun eventually had to be taken out of service because our Forward Observer could not find where its rounds were landing. Strewn above our position were 6 to 8 frozen bodies, mostly German, but at least one American. Sometimes dead bodies were booby trapped.

After a few days some of our men tied ropes to the stiff bodies and dragged them across the snow to where they could pile them up. Then they were taken on a weapons carrier to Graves Registration.

During this period as we supported the Huertgen Operation, especially in mid and late December 1944, we were occasionally shelled by German 105s. After dark on December 17th and 18th we had a lot of German Air Force activity overhead, and on December 26th, right after Christmas, 4 ME 109's Messerschershmits strafed our position. Fortunately, no one was injured, as we all dove into our fox holes. Generally, we benefited considerably from our air superiority.





My Command Post near Huertgen, Germany

The German 105s we were using at this point had a very considerable muzzle blast to the rear from the muzzle deflectors. On several occasions, this ignited the highly flammable camouflage nets covering the howitzers. Therefore, we had to raise the nets.

Near my guns, there was a smashed one-room building. Under it, I found a cellar with an arched stone roof. A ladder gave access to the safest command post sleeping quarters I ever had. Only the 1,780 pound shells, fired from a huge, German, railroad gun at more important targets, could occasionally disturb our slumbers.

*The following is my contemporary account of the Period  
12/4/1944-12/24/1944 when I commanded a German 105mm  
Howitzer unit supporting our troops in the Huertgen Forest*

JOURNAL OF EVENTS

**Battery "C". ---- F.A. Group Provisional Battery. –  
105mm HOW. (German)**

- 04 December, 1944 - Battery "C", ---- F.A. Bn. Received four (4)  
105mm Howitzers (German). Total in Btry – 6.  
Broke drawbar on #2 backing Howitzer off road.  
Part removed and welded by Ordinance.
- 05 December, 1944 - Cleaned and inspected material. On carriage,  
range quadrants found to be inaccurate owing  
to excessive lost motion. Made quadrant seats  
by removing paint on top of breech ring in  
small spots. German quadrant seats do not fit  
MI quadrant. Studied ammunition and  
service of piece.
- 06 December, 1944 - Proof fired 2 rounds per piece. No defects noted.
- 09 December, 1944 - Ordered to report for reconnaissance at 1300  
hours, at ----- C.P. Reconnoitered area 1 mile  
north of Hurtgen, Germany, -----
- 10 December, 1944 - Reconnoitered area 3 miles west of Hurtgen,  
Germany.
- 11 December, 1944 - Reported for reconnaissance at 0900 hours with  
Btry Executive, Motor Officer, and Driver.  
Reconnoitered area 1/2 mile SW Hurtgen -----  
from road. Bn C.O. arrived 1100 hours and  
approved selection. Entered area on foot  
reconnaissance. Motor Officer, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt.  
-----stepped on an AP mine south of the gun  
position. His foot was blown off. Rendered First  
Aid and evacuated him to the ---Medical Bn.

- 12 December, 1944 - Met party from ---- Engineers at selected position. Light shelling in vicinity of area designated to be cleared. Found Teller and Reigal mines. In clearing one road-block of Reigal mines, one of the Engineer party stepped on an AP mine and lost his foot. Continued preparations and reported to Bn. C.O that casualties must be expected as mine detectors did not pick up this type AP mine. Code Name ---- received.
- 13 December, 1944 - Gave orders to move to new position by infiltration to allow maximum care in occupation and because of traffic on the narrow mountain roads through the forest. A guide familiar with the route accompanied each echelon of 3 vehicles. An M-10A1 motor carriage was taken into the position first and exploded 4 AP mines. These tanks were invaluable as the only safe and effective means of clearing them. Party from ----- Engineers found more Reigal mines, a prepared charge and pullignite. Enroute, the drawbar broke on #2. An attempt to pull it by a cable failed and the Howitzer was finally brought into the position with trails lifted and towed by the chain hoist on the maintenance truck. A Diamond T prime mover struck an AP mine which blew a large hole in the tire, but there was no other damage. Only 4 Howitzers were brought forward this day as it was considered unwise to have sections arrive without sufficient daylight to prepare positions.
- 14 December, 1944 - Brought up 2 remaining Howitzers and continued organization of position. A Diamond T struck a mine in front of #3 Howitzer position, which detonated 13 Reigal mines which the engineers had placed at the side of the road after clearing them and 3 hitherto undisclosed Reigal. The resulting explosion ignited the 8 cans of gas



carried on the vehicle. Quick, heroic Action by 1<sup>st</sup>. Lt. Wallace S. Coutes, O-1178449, The Btry Executive, rescued the driver, Tec. 5-----and prevented the explosion of nearby Howitzer ammunition. Pfc. ----- were also injured and evacuated to the ----- Medical Bn. Tec 5 -----died of wounds in the hospital.

15 December, 1944 - Number 4 Gun was registered using charge 4 and Btry massed well for range and deflection. No. 3 gun was not fired because of suspected damage from explosion and fire. No. 4 failed to return into battery until muzzle was depressed. Nitrogen added, corrected this malfunction. Btry fired 131 rounds. The following characteristics of the weapon were noted: Numerous hangfires occurred caused by poor primers and by the condition of available ammunition. The lanyard required a very strong pull on all pieces. The very considerable flash from the muzzle is deflected to the rear by the muzzle brake and ignited the highly inflammable camouflage nets in several instances. Owing to this, it is dangerous to use the net in the conventional manner and the powder must not be kept under it. When the breach is opened, the fresh oxygen will often cause unburned powder to flare. If the primer is not screwed all the way into the cartridge case, it protrudes from the rear and the breach-block will jam and not close. Recuperator cylinder leaks both nitrogen and oil. High percentage of wet powder charges. Range drum has constant play, preventing continuous accuracy and necessitating use of gunners quadrant. Wheels cannot be individually locked, so it is more difficult to maneuver the piece uncoupled. Despite the shipping crate, some shells are found with bent or dented fuses. Shield prevents locating an aiming point in any direction except to left rear. Excessive powder flash is very evident during night firing.

- 16 December, 1944 - Btry fired 105 rounds. No. 4 gun registered with charge V and the Btry was brought in with converged sheaf. No. 3 gun had been examined by Ordnance and recoil checked. It was not in sheaf and rounds could not be found even after making large shifts. Piece was again called out and the laying checked. Area was shelled from 1330 hours to 1430 hours with about 55 rounds of 105mm.
- 17 December, 1944 - Btry fired 133 rounds. No. 3 gun was fired again in an attempt to discover where it was shooting, from a new O.P., but without success. Bn. C.O. ordered piece out until further notice. Hostile planes persistently over area after dark.
- 18 December, 1944 - Much G.A.F. activity. Btry fired 217 rounds of 105 mm (German) and 180 rounds of 50 Cal. M.G.
- 19 December, 1944 - Suggested air O.P. be used to find #3's rounds or requested replacement for Howitzer. 191 rounds of 105mm fired.
- 20 December, 1944 - Visibility poor all day. Two replacements joined Btry. Dug in guns. Removed bodies of 6 Germans and 1 American from Howitzer position. Btry fired 93 rounds of 105mm.
- 21 December, 1944 - Visibility poor. Improved position and Btry Fired 53 rounds.
- 22 December, 1944 - B.C. at O.P. all day. Visibility very poor. Btry fired 48 rounds.
- 23 December, 1944 - Received warning orders for movement in 2- 3 days, leaving Howitzers in place. No. 4's recuperator fails to retain causing tube to fail to return into battery. Btry fired 59 rounds.

- 24 December, 1944 - B.C. at O.P. No ammo released for targets of opportunity. No. 6 breech-block froze. Poured gasoline on it and lit it melting ice. Spades frozen in delayed shifting trail. Put recuperator from No. 3 on No. 4. (First attempted to put No. 4's tube on No. 3, but did not have proper wrenches). Warned to keep especially alert during holidays. Btry fired 95 rounds.
- 25 December, 1944 - Btry fired 82 rounds. Received orders of Release from -----F.A. Group Provisional Bn., Effective 1200, 26 December 44.
- 26 December, 1944 - Btry fired 82 rounds. B.C. and Reconnaissance Party reported to ----F.A. Bn at 0800 hours. Btry area strafed by 4 ME 109's, but there was no damage nor casualties. Left Hurtgen, Germany, at 1240 hours and marched to Temporary Bivouac area, vicinity of Stolberg, Germany, arriving at 1330 hours.

### **Combat Lesson**

If it is necessary to occupy a mined area, plan carefully for all installations including vehicle parking space and routes and clear only what is necessary. The Engineers and your men who must do the work will do their best work if they are told what each place is being cleared for. Present it as a series of individual jobs and they will see the necessity for each. General instructions to clear the whole area from -----to ----- put unnecessary work and hazard on the men. Economy of their efforts is appreciated.

### **Christmas Visitor 1944**

To my utter amazement, my good friend, Capt. Benmont Tench, appeared at our Huertgen firing location bearing Christmas gifts. Benmont was with a Ninth Army unit, then located well north of Aachen. He and his driver had to pass many checkpoints at a time when English-speaking Germans were infiltrating our lines. His journey took all day. How he found me was a miracle. Our sign on the forest road bore only the code designation, DANDELION. The chocolate cake he gave me did not last long, but it was greatly appreciated. They spent the night and departed early on their arduous return journey.

### **Let Sleeping Dogs Lie**

In the Forest, we supported in turn the 28<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions which were badly mauled. I remember going out to look for targets and saw a German unit. I went to the Infantry CO to discuss the situation. I offered to demolish the German troops facing them. The Captain told me he did not want to stir them up. "Let the sleeping dogs lie," He said.

The 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was sent south to a quiet zone to rest and recover. It was thinly deployed over a 45 mile long front to screen the First Army's right flank.

## **Chapter 14: ARDENNES CAMPAIGN**

### **The Battle of the Bulge**

On December 16, 1944, the German Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies surprised General Bradley's 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group with a major counterattack from the Ardennes Forest. The ensuing Bulge separated the 12<sup>th</sup> from Field Marshall Montgomery's 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group and threatened our gasoline dumps which might have enabled the panzers to reach the North Sea. The 28<sup>th</sup> Division

bore the brunt of the initial attack and slowed it considerably, providing time for the Allied reaction.

### **Hearing of the Massacre of GIs at Malmedy**

On the day the Germans started their Ardennes Campaign, in a surprise attack that we called "The Bulge," Battery B of the 285<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Observation Battalion was reassigned from the VII Corps, the same Corps as my 266<sup>th</sup> FA Bn, to the VIII Corps. Their mission used flash and sound to detect the location of enemy artillery to be used for counter-battery. The next day on December 17, 1944, most of the unit of men in jeeps with only small arms proceeded to its new assignment at St. Vith passing through Malmedy. Near there it was confronted by an SS Panzer unit which forced their surrender. Of the 113 men originally, 84 were massacred in a field. Some escaped including 21 survivors. Right about that time, from Dec 13<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup>, 1944, we were only 12 miles to the north in the Huertgen Forest. We learned of this shortly thereafter.

### **R & R and Skis in Liege**



Woman & Child in the Ardennes

After we left Brenig in January of 1945 to join up with VII Corps, I actually got a day off to go into Liege, Belgium with some of my men for some rest and recreation. There, I took advantage of the opportunity to buy a pair of skis. Yes, skis! I was concerned about

mines and by filing a channel around the heel of my combat boots I could use them as ski boots. This enabled me to move through the snow spreading my weight over a wider area and reduce my chances of directly stepping on a mine and losing a foot.

## Our Reserve

On December 26<sup>th</sup> we left Huertgen and picked up our 240's. We



were told that we would be attached to VII Corps which was in reserve. We soon learned that General Collins had five divisions, all with their three regiments each fully committed and fighting as

240 mm in the Ardennes; Sgt Widden on the right hard as they could. That was our reserve.

Because of the deep split in our lines, all our forces on the north side were assigned to Field Marshall Montgomery, including our First and Ninth Armies. All located on the south side were kept by General Bradley. I only saw Monty once when his open Rolls Royce was stuck in traffic. He didn't seem to like it.

## Night Marches - Blackout - Bridge at River Aisne

After fighting in the Ardennes to push back the Bulge, we had to make many night marches under blackout conditions. On one night march in total darkness, we came upon the River Aisne with a large stone bridge across it at a very deep and steep gorge. A sign read "11 tons."

We could not cross further to the north because of German fire. To the south was another bridge, but it was part of the main supply route for another Corps that clearly would not want us to preempt their bridge.



Each of my prime movers weighed 22 tons and each towed a 22 ton gun carriage for a total of 44 tons when they went across one at a time. The bridge was two way, so I could double the capacity to 22 tons, if we stopped oncoming traffic. I assumed it was built with a 100% safety factor., so I doubled it again to 44 tons. Just enough!

Because it was pitch black, I placed two white handkerchiefs in my rear pockets and instructed the driver to drive in the center of the bridge following me at a walking pace. This worked. If it hadn't, we'd have ended up in the gorge below. The driver pulling the last howitzer cut the corner at the far end of the bridge and the gun carriage brushed a large stone abutment and sent it crashing down into the dark gorge far below.

### **Snow Awakening**

Every night, I would set up my pup tent and put in my bed roll. When I retired, I'd just crawl in and go to sleep. On this particular night, I was so tired that I did not set up my tent and just went to sleep in my bed roll. The next morning I awoke to find myself covered in 3 inches of snow.

### **Fighting The Bulge**

On December 27, 1944, we were firing from Durbuy. The Bulge was forty miles wide and sixty miles deep. General Collins, CO of the VII Corps counterattacked almost 100,000 men supported by Typhoons and Lightnings. The panzer spearhead was running out of fuel and

ammunition. Fatigued and dispersed, many Germans abandoned their tanks and retreated on foot. The tide had turned. Fighting in hills and steep valleys covered with snow was

Loading an HE Projectile



very different than dashing across sunny France. Our 22-ton loads were pulled by powerful full-track M10-A3 armored tank destroyers without the turret. The driver had a lever in each hand which controlled the track on that side. Pushed forward, it applied more power. Backward actuated the brakes. The difference in speed between the tracks steered the prime mover. However, when the drag of a 22-ton load exceeded the



differential between the tracks, it did not turn. This usually occurred when we needed to turn at a crossroad above a steep slope. I soon learned to post a 6 x 6 truck with a cable there

Loading the powder

to drag the front of the prime mover to the desired direction.

### **Good Bye Telephone Pole**

On one cold, blackout march I found one of our powerful M1-A3s, while pulling a 22-ton gun carriage up a long steep hill, had slid



off the icy road and was dragging its load up with one track in the deep gutter. He had stopped just short of an unavoidable seven-inch wood service pole. I told him to go ahead, and the tank smashed through the pole leaving the upper

A Tank Destroyer Without the Turret



part dangling from the wires it had supported. The driver proceeded up the hill and got back on the road on the far down-slope.

### **I Capture 8 During the Bulge**

During the Battle of the Bulge, I had the men set up the howitzers on a small farm. As they worked, they suddenly realized that there were some Germans in the farm house in the field. Although there were over 200 of us, I approached the house cautiously and I yelled in my butchered German, “Commen Zee hout, mit hands hup.” And out came 8 German soldiers with their hands up!

## **Chapter 15: Cologne Cathedral**

### **International Treasure**

Following the failure of the German attack from the Ardennes, defeated panzer units were escaping across the Rhine over the Hindenburg



Cologne Cathedral from the East

Bridge. To end this, its destruction was ordered. Adjacent to the highway which led to the bridge was the beautiful Cologne Cathedral which had been recognized as an International Treasure by high officials, as well as by dedicated Monuments Men. It had, thus far, survived the many bombings which had devastated Cologne. The delicate mission was given to C Battery, then located about twelve and a half miles due west of the bridge. I saw that our high-explosive shells must pass within a few yards

of the twin towers, and a short round landing in the adjacent street would surely bring down the north wall. I therefore had the Chief of Section double check the Gunner's laying before each round was fired. Happily, we dropped the bridge structure in the water without damage to the Cathedral.

### **Souvenir Drilling**

As usual, I went into Cologne to view our target and was glad we had not damaged the nearby Cathedral. While there, I saw a large pile of weapons. It was necessary to disarm the civilian population, and this was a collection point. I had a copy of the order allowing our soldiers to take them, and I rummaged through the pile and found a beautifully engraved, three barreled Drilling – two twelve gauge barrels over a 9.3 mm rifle barrel. I mailed this deer gun home and still have it.

### **Ammo & Hot Tires on Fire**

We were moving up by infiltration, one section at a time. I'd gone ahead of my battery to reconnoiter and found a place to bivouac. We needed a Route Marker to turn the elements in as they arrived. Officers were not allowed to drive, so I couldn't use my driver to direct the unit. When the First Section arrived, I had him escort it, and I became the Route Guide myself. I noted that the Section's 8-ton trailer, loaded with ammunition, had a flat tire and ordered it to be dropped out of the way until the maintenance truck arrived to fix it. The Section moved on and I was left alone to wait for the next.

After a few minutes, I heard a crackling sound and to my horror saw a thin blue flame along the bottom of the tire. The flexing of the tire pulled by a twenty two ton prime mover had generated enough heat to flame when it got oxygen. The temptation was to run. But, if I ran down the road to intercept the rest of the battery, my driver would arrive without warning. I had only a useless pistol and a sheath knife on my belt. The flames began to widen and turned yellow. I had to put it out. With the knife, I

loosened dirt and piled it with my bare hands against the tire high enough to smother the blaze. It was a race, and I won.

### **Positioning Heavy Artillery**

Contrary to what many assume, often Heavy Artillery like my 240mms was positioned as far forward as possible in front of light and medium artillery in order to strike strategic targets in the enemy's rear. On one such occasion, as we approached the Rhine River, we were ordered to emplace on the forward slope of the west bank. There were German 88s on the opposite slope!

One gun I was able to locate behind a small hill. Another, I positioned behind a two-story house. After the first round was fired, all the shingles came down from the concussion. After the second, the roof collapsed. Although we took some fire, the remaining rubble still provided some cover. Our target was to interdict the Autobahn on the far side of the Rhine.

### **Out Front with 240s & Germans Below Us**

Occasionally our batteries were positioned in front of the American Infantry! This enabled us to reach deep behind the lines to attack storage facilities, motor pools, HQ locations, etc. Once, this occurred accidentally.

In the Rhineland after the battle of the Bulge, as it was getting dark, I ordered the Battery (C/266 FA BN) to turn off the road at a little village on the top of a small hill and set up. They placed one howitzer (240mm) on each side of the road. The next morning, we woke up to discover at the bottom of the hill about 300 yards away a German unit dug in with fortified positions.

We had six 50cal machine guns, mostly on vehicles for air defense, to defend ourselves, but we were not looking to start something. I warned the men to take care, especially when the Infantry came up - there was going to be trouble.

However, when they did come up, I happened to be in the village on a bicycle. I had to take shelter behind a 6" curb. So, it was

ironic that after telling all my men to be careful, I ended up in the most exposed position flat on my stomach. Our Infantry chased the Germans away.

### **Awarded La Croix de Guerre**

After leaving Outreroarche, Belgium on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1945, I received Le Croix de Guerre avec etoile Vermil (with gold plated silver star) along with 2 or 3 other American servicemen. The certificate was signed by Le General de Gaulle.

I was called to a place convenient for the French General. He had a big moustache and kissed me on both cheeks. At the request of the French, the Commander of the US First Army, Gen. Bradley, made this selection for their award. I believe this is the highest military award the French give to non-French citizens.

Years later, I was also made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor.

## **Chapter 16: Crossing the Rhine**

### **The Bridge at Remagen - Bad Gotesburg**

A Unit from another Corps captured the railroad Bridge at Remagen, a key to crossing the Rhine. "Lightning Joe" Collins, the VII Corps Commander, was nonplussed by this, so he requested General Bradley, the Commander of the American 1st Army, turn the bridge over to the VII Corps. And Gen. Bradley did!

My unit, the 266<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Bn, crossed at Remagen some time later on a pontoon bridge



Crossing the Rhine at Remagen

adjacent to the famous railway bridge. Nearby was a sign “Drive with care. A medium tank will not float.”

### **Surrender of German Battalion to Me**

After we had crossed the Rhine, we participated in the encirclement of the large Ruhr Pocket. During one afternoon of this period, I was in my jeep with my driver and radio operator on a back dirt road, when across a field I saw a German Soldier



waving a big white flag. We approached him and in broken English he indicated that he wanted us to follow him to his unit which wanted to surrender. Germans did not want to be captured by the Russians.

Ruhr Countryside in the Ruhr Pocket

He directed us riding on the hood of my jeep through a forest along a dirt road. We went with care fearing a possible trap. We eventually came upon a battalion of German soldiers with 20

The German Battalion AM III Captured





to negotiate the surrender of his unit to me, but I demanded unilateral surrender. When he asked for a truck to carry the wounded, I agreed. But as the Germans marched on, I was not surprised that this CO had taken the passenger seat in the front of the truck. In addition, we kept their 22 pistols which I gave to my sergeants and we threw all the rifle bolts down the well. We did not want their unit supply of tobacco products, so we let their First Sergeant take the cigarettes up into the nearby barn and throw them out to the Germans below. It was pleasure watching them beat each other up fighting and scrambling for what could be their last smokes for a very long time. We got back to the 266th FA Bn and then marched them down to a Prisoner of War collection point. I took the unit payroll to Finance and got a receipt, but I kept the safe. There were a couple of cases of premium liquor marked "Reserved for the Wehrmacht" in German. I gave them to my sergeants to distribute to each gun section.

### **Leaving the Coal Mine**

In early April of 1945 we were at the Concordia Coal Mine on the culm outside the mine entrance. At 11:30am we were completing a fire mission when the order came down, "Cease Firing, March Order." Headquarters advised that the battalion was scheduled to leave at 12:00 noon. "You'll never make it, but do the best you can." Fortunately, both howitzers were situated on flat, firm culm from the mine which facilitated the crane operation. We were



Btry C, 266 FA Bn leaving the Concordia Mine prepared, and in 20 minutes #2's tube was off the carriage and onto its wagon. Ten minutes later the carriage was ready to go. The Initial Point for the march was nearby, and the Section made the deadline.

Shortcutting approved procedures, the crew of the First Section got it to the IP in 40 minutes. The time length of the 142 vehicle column at fifteen miles per hour was a matching 40 minutes, and the Section slipped in just behind the rear maintenance truck. It was a record performance under ideal conditions by a highly-experienced gun-crew. Normally, it would have taken at least three to six times as long.

From there, we went to Langenholding Housen to bivouac.

### **Horses Killed**

In 1945, the Germans still had several horse drawn artillery units. One of the saddest sights I ever saw during the war, other than Buchenwald, was a group of horses that had been killed by another unit of artillery. We were traveling through the Rhineland when we came upon them. It was awful. The Germans used horses to pull some of their guns and these horses had been hit in their traces.

### **Liberating a Champagne Factory**

As the war started to wind down in Germany, one of my Sergeants came up to me and asked for a 2 1/2 ton truck and a Detail of men. I asked, "What for?" and he replied, "You don't want to know, Sir." I said, "Okay, but don't get me into any trouble."

Later, he brought back a truck full of green champagne. My share was a full case, which I saved for my 27th birthday on 6/12/1945. I can tell you this about green champagne-the next day, when you take your first glass of water, your head takes off where you ended the night before.

### **Depreciating an Asset**

In the Rhineland, I was passing through a region we had been shelling, and I noticed over the door of a factory that had been flattened, the inscription, "Rhine-Westphalia Power Corp." I immediately recognized that name since my father had bought

stock for me in that company as a child because it paid a big dividend and, when purchased, was steady and secure.

So, I'd been depreciating my own asset.

## **Buchenwald**

Shortly before VE day, a senior officer told me that there was a Nazi Death Camp liberated on April 4, 1945 that was only twenty seven miles north of us and strongly suggested that I see the atrocities there first hand. I had a jeep and driver and took his advice. When we got there, the Main Gate was open and scores of former inmates, still in their prison garb, were milling about with no place to go.

A large railroad yard held scores of empty box-cars which had brought a stream of thousands of Jews and political prisoners to the site. There, brutal armed guards marched them to rust-colored wooden barracks where their possessions were confiscated, a serial number was tattooed on each one, and they were put in prison uniforms to become slave-laborers forced to work from dawn to dusk in field, farm, and factory as well as on the roads. They slept three abreast on slanted wood platforms, three high, and nine to each structure. Large iron pots over a small fire provided a thin gruel for an inadequate daily ration, and whenever a worker was rebellious or their health broke down, they were sent to the death complex.

Near a large gas-fired crematorium with two huge furnaces side by side, was a long building with a row of steel hooks three feet apart six feet above the floor. The victim's hands were tied together behind their backs, and their feet were tied together. A short rope spliced into a circular noose was placed around the neck, given a few twists, and the lifted victims were hung on the hook above to be choked to death by their own weight. The torture of this method was depicted by the way the bloody fingers of the tied hands had impinged on the stucco wall. I saw no gas chambers which would have been almost merciful compared to the actual method employed.



I did see the laboratories and clinics where “scientists” experimented with live humans, and I noted in the luxurious quarters of the party leaders lampshades made of human skin made to illuminate the tattoos thereon.

## Chapter 17 VE Day

### Respite at Hotel Blocher

Shortly before VE Day (May 8, 1945) on April 24th, 1945, we moved from a bivouac near Frankenburg to quarter at The Hotel Blocher at Hertzhausen on the Edersee. This was as far East as the 266<sup>th</sup> FA Bn got. It was east of Cologne/Koln and south of Frankfurt and was adjacent to Hermann Goering’s personal hunting preserve. I forbade hunting with M-1s, because of their



long range permitting only carbines, but boar and venison were a lot better than C Rations.

Prior to this, our last firings were from Concordia Mines / Dermbach about April 4-10, 1945.

CPT Markle (2nd from right) with his Battery C Lieutenants

Overall, the battery was under fire in Europe for about 10 months.

### Money Laundering

We had a rascal in our Battery, an enlisted man named Gent. In an abandoned house in Germany, he had found a quantity of German Marks. GI’s were paid in US Government Script instead of dollars or Marks as a security measure. Gent could not use the Marks he had purloined. Gent cleverly created a business collecting films from GIs who wanted to get them developed and printed using local camera shops or photographers with their

own labs. Then he would be paid in script at the official rate and pay for the developing with purloined Marks. We could never prove a crime, so he was never charged. However, the rascal got away with money laundering, and I had my 1st SGT and a few burley non-coms explain to him that Battery C men do not steal.

### **3 Day Pass - Churchill**

After VE Day and the War was over, C Battery of the 266<sup>th</sup> Artillery Bn that I was commanding was assigned to guard the huge Third Army Ammo Depot. I was made Provost Marshal.

Unexpectedly, on June 10, 1945, I was told that I could have a three day pass in London. This was much to my surprise. Of course, I accepted eagerly. It turned out that of all thousands of troops in that area, they selected only 12 officers to go to London for 3 days for R&R. Off we went. It was quite an honor to be included.

We arrived & billeted in BOQs that were very nice. Then I discovered that the major object of the other 11 guys was to drink. Alcohol was not available except through the US Air Force. They had taken over all the military rec facilities in London. We tried several-but were told they were reserved for the Air Corps. We were not welcome. One chap told us if we were Airborne we could come in. Since our 240mm howitzers weighed 44 tons, we were anything but airborne. However, our leave orders were written by the 19<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps! I displayed them, and we were granted their hospitality.

I was not interested in drinking. But the war was over, and I asked myself, what do you do in London? Go to the Theater. In our quarters there was a Concierge Desk. I went down to book and the attractive young lady there gave me some possibilities.

She was so helpful that I asked if she'd like to have dinner and go with me. Suddenly, we had reservations at the fanciest restaurant in London. Plus, we got the tickets to the most popular play. It was a most enjoyable evening. Her name was Phyllis Oliver.

She then suggested we go to a nightclub. We taxied to the one she selected and lo and behold, when we got there we met her parents. Her father was an actor named Vic Oliver who was well known at the time. We had a nightcap. Then she went home with them, and I went to the BOQ. These remained just pleasant memories for many, many years until I read a book in 2016 about Winston Churchill's wife, *Clementine, The Wife of Winston Churchill*, by Sonia Parnell. The book was very interesting with many insights into a man I greatly admired, Winston Churchill. In it, Clementine mentioned that they had been very concerned about their third child, Sarah, who had fallen in love with a divorced actor. She had become artistic and rebellious and even danced in public wearing as little as one could in those days. That actor turned out to be the Vic Oliver, whom she later married and that I'd met decades earlier in London with Phyllis.

Phyllis was the daughter of Victor from a prior marriage. So, she was the step-daughter of Sarah and therefore, the step-granddaughter of Clementine and Winston. So, I'd enjoyed a date with the Prime Minister's step-granddaughter!

### **Visit to Compiegne**

Just east of Paris, I had the opportunity to visit Compiegne, the site of the WWI armistice which was impressed on Germany by the victorious Allies. The terms of this treaty were repressive,



and exorbitant reparations were required.

These were widely resented, and this contributed to the rise to power by Hitler and the Nazis who brought on WWII.

Recognizing the failure of harsh terms, in 1946, the allies subsidized the reconstruction of Europe with the Marshall Plan, which among other benefits, gave Europe modern efficient steel plants which could deliver

A lion at Compiegne

products to U.S. customers at prices well below those of our ageing, less efficient domestic suppliers.

### **10 Months Under Fire**

By VE Day, on May 8, 1945, I had served with the 266<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion under fire for 10 months and 3 days since landing on Omaha Beach on July 5, 1944. It was November, 1945 before I would sail home. And fortunately, not to Japan. There was at least one silver lining: the priority by which one was sent back to the States was on a point system that took into account the length of one's tour, the time in combat (10 months), the number of one's campaigns (5), one's awards (Croix de Guerre) and so forth. As a result, I had a high priority, but nevertheless, I did not get home until about Thanksgiving 1945.

## **Chapter 18 After VE Day**

### **Provost Marshall & the French Master SGT with Ammo**

After VE Day and the War was over, C Battery of the 266<sup>th</sup> Artillery Bn that I commanded was assigned to guard Ordnance Depot 0-611 for the Third Army. I was made Provost Marshal for this Ammo dump on French soil. Along the roads there were piles of Artillery shells and other ammunition every 100 yards or so for miles and miles, for which I was responsible. I also had Summary Court martial authority for law and order in an area from Metz to Verdun and all the way up to Luxembourg, covering 280 square miles. It included French and Italian Labor Companies, many German Prisoners of War, and a French mining population. I was the Chief of Police with Summary Jurisdiction as well as Judge, Jury and Prosecutor. I never had so much power in all my life.

We had our HQs in the little village of Etain, east of Verdun. I had all my men from Battery C with its vehicles plus six military policemen and two antiquated fire engines. One morning, I heard a boom and off to the west I saw an ugly cloud of black smoke. Then another boom! "My god!" With all these munitions, what is happening? I assembled a task force including the fire engines and took off for the hills. A couple of miles northwest, I found a French Master Sergeant blowing up WWI ammunition in a field near hundreds of thousands of pounds of current high explosives!

I ordered him to stop, and he indicated he would not. So, I put him under arrest and started an international incident. Subsequently, it was recognized that the 155MM shells he was blowing up were a little too close to the WWII ammo nearby. It all blew over, not up.

Fortunately, the other problems with which I had to deal were not nearly so potentially catastrophic: speeders in 6x6 trucks wheeling around narrow French roads and a lot of drunk and disorderlies at the labor companies or mines from weekend carousing and brawls at the legal French whore house. The prisoners of war were no problem because they were locked in camps. I held this position until early November when I received orders to go to Wings Collection Point to return home.

### **The Duties of French Aspirant Officer Pegoff**

As Provost Marshal for the huge Third Army Depot, I had a subordinate sub-lieutenant, French Aspirant Officer named Pegoff. This was a tough area and every Saturday night, fights would break out in one bar or another. Prostitution was legal in France. Every week, it was Pegoff's duty to make the rounds of the whore houses with a medical team that would inspect the women for disease. It was his major responsibility to take those who had contracted something to the hospital for treatment.



### **Barge to Gravy Boat**

I knew a Captain in the Quartermaster Corps who had signed for a large barge. Somehow it sank, and he faced the Army docking his pay until it was paid for. Every year, there was a property accounting, and responsible officers could describe the condition of the property in their custody on Form OS&D - Over, Short, and Damaged. But, one also could recategorize the material, and every year he did so. By this process, the Barge became "One (1) Boat, Row," and then "One (1) Boat, Gravy." Finally, he used his breakage allowance to write it off entirely. The OS&D method had saved him almost \$100,000

### **Collection Points as Cigarettes**

After WWII ended, we were sent to Collection Points to prepare for transportation home. These were named after popular Cigarette brands such as Marlboro, Pall Mall, and Lucky Strike. Mine was Wings. We had received orders for redeployment to Japan. But then the Atomic Bombs were dropped and Japan surrendered. So, we received new orders to return to the States. Because President Truman decided to drop the A-Bombs on Japan,



CPT Markle (on right) and Lt Rovey at Wings

that decision saved me and a million other soldiers on both sides from dying in a prolonged war to take the Japanese homeland.

Enlisted men had to line up for an inspection by the medical unit. Those who had VD did not go home! At Wings, we had a choice to take a later ship with a billet, i.e. your own bunk, or you Boarding the "Costa Rica"





could go ASAP on a troop ship with “Hot Bedding.” However, this meant 2 men shared the same bunk with 12 hours on and 12 hours off. When it was not your turn, there was nowhere to go but on deck, where it was cold, wet and windy. I ended up on the “Costa Rica,” a Victory ship that took us in nine days to Boston harbor.

### **CPT Markle to Port Side**

After WWII ended, I came home after nine days at sea on the Victory Ship, the “Costa Rica,” into Boston Harbor on November 15, 1945. We were greeted with considerable fanfare, a flotilla and fire boats spraying water. But to my surprise, over the loud-speaker came, “Captain Markle to Port Side, Captain Markle to Port Side,” repeatedly.



Welcome home in Boston Harbor

When I got to the rail of the port side of the ship, I saw alongside it, a tug with a pretty blond calling my name. She hollered up to me. It was my cousin, Mary Markle Bannard, whose husband was the head of SS Pierce Co. She lived in Boston and had come out to welcome me and to see my safe return!

### **Battleship leaves Port**

My friend, Jim Sands, as a lowly ensign, was assigned early in WWII to a U.S. Navy mission in Murmansk, Russia to coordinate the delivery of Lend Lease military material to that country. He was required to deal with high-ranking Russian officers and was rapidly promoted. To level the diplomatic playing field, he became a Commander early in the war.

After victory in Europe, we were still at war with Japan, and Jim reported to Washington for reassignment. A Personnel Officer politely asked him what duty he would prefer. Jim said that he had been in the Navy for years but had never been to sea. He was told that that would be quite possible and then was asked on what sort of ship he would like to serve. His reply was “a battleship.” That also was no problem.

Jim reported to his ship at Newport News and discovered that, while the Captain and the Executive Officer were Academy graduates with long service and time in grade, he was senior to all the other officers aboard. His ship was scheduled to sail at six o'clock the next Sunday morning, and of course there was a big party at the Officer's Club that Saturday night.

Early Sunday morning, Jim was on the bridge eager to see everything. At 5:30am, the Chief Petty Officer approached him and reported that the Captain was still in his cabin and the Exec had a “Do Not Disturb” sign on his door. Jim told him that he expected that one would appear shortly. They both knew that a well-trained Watch Officer had to have years of experience before being given the responsibility of sailing or docking such a ship. At 5:45 the above scene was repeated. Then at 5:55 the Chief again asked for instructions. Jim politely inquired, “Do you know the drill?” The Chief replied, “Of course, Sir.” Jim then

told him to “Stand beside me and tell me the proper commands at the right time.” The battleship sailed as scheduled without incident.

The Captain thought the Exec had taken her out, while the Exec assumed that the Captain had done so. It was two days later that they discovered what Jim had done, and the embarrassment was so great that no action was ever taken. This only goes to show the truth of the old adage “The Chiefs Run the Navy,” or could.

## **Chapter 19 Reserves & National Guard**

### **Joined the Reserves then the PA National Guard**

After returning to the States from Europe in 1945, I joined the Reserves. I served under COL George Strong, CO of the 479th FA Group and was promoted to Major. After several years, I left to join the PA National Guard’s 28<sup>th</sup> Division, the “Bloody Bucket,” so named for all the casualties it took during WWII, especially in the Huertgen Forest and later in the Ardennes during the Bulge.

### **Tuna Catch on Penobscot River**

Two acquaintances of mine on Nantucket caught a huge Tuna just before they were to ship out for the Korean build up. So, this guy tells his wife that she is responsible for it and he ships out.

She puts it in a clean GI can (galvanized trash can) and fills it with ice. She gets this can and Tuna loaded into the trunk of her car and she drives it up to Maine where she was meeting friends. There, her friends had their 12 year old boy fishing on the pier on the Penobscot River.

They scheme to pull a joke on the friend’s husband who is coming from work. They attach the Tuna to the boy’s fishing line and signal him when to “catch it.” Well, as the father comes home, the boy pretends he’s just caught this giant tuna. The

father's shocked and runs to grab his son wrapping his arms around him, so he won't get pulled in. Completely fooled!

Later, they hang it in a tree near the road and a passing motorist is so shocked to see it, he drives into the ditch and into the field!

### **G-2 for the 28<sup>th</sup> Division in USA & Germany**

After five years in the Reserves I was asked by General Strickler to join his staff as Assistant Chief of Staff, as G-2 in the PA National Guard, and I took the position in 1950. During the start of the Korean Conflict, the 28<sup>th</sup> was called up to go to Germany to be part of an increased presence to oppose the Russians, who might have been tempted to take advantage of the fact that so many of our forces were going to Korea.

Before we flew over to Germany in 1951, we participated in the 28th Division parade from the Art Museum to City Hall in Philadelphia. General Strickler led the parade and, as the Division G-2 (Intelligence), I was in the row of 4 men right behind him, his staff officers. My father, Alvan Markle Jr, and his second wife, Ruth, came down to see the parade.

Our headquarters was on what had been a Luftwaffe Airbase in Goppingen, GER near Stuttgart. Our headquarters were in the lovely, former Luftwaffe Officers' Club, which included a huge, laundry type tub, but with bars around it for the officers to hold on to as they barfed.

While at the Command and General Staff College earlier, I purchased an Oldsmobile 88 which shocked some people, because that was "a Colonel's car" and I was only a Major. I took it to Germany where its high compression engine had trouble with the Quartermaster's low octane gas. Fortunately, I found a good mechanic who tuned it to run like a watch on Quartermaster gas, the only available fuel.

## **The End for a Russian Spy**

My duties in Germany as G-2 (Intelligence and Counterintelligence) for the Division included trying to detect and catch East German and Russian Spies. On one occasion, we were watching a suspect, but he got on to us while he was on a train. To try to slip us, he went to the rear door of the car as the train approached the station intending to jump off as it was still moving. Unfortunately for him as he jumped and rolled, his head struck a stone mile marker which finished him off.

As part of these duties, I was responsible for the security clearances for the 17,000 men in the Division. Therefore, I was assigned a Counterintelligence corps detachment of 21 men to assist in checking backgrounds. They caused me more trouble than the Russian Army. They were always very suspicious of someone and squabbling among themselves, squabbles I'd have to settle.

This also entailed a lot of paper pushing. Fortunately, I had CPT Bailey to handle that aspect. One plus, I got to go to the European Command Intelligence School, "For Spies and Provocateurs" near Oberammergau, Germany. Another plus, I got to do a lot of skiing in Germany and Switzerland.

Actually, my primary responsibility was planning our defenses, if the Russians attacked through the Fulda Gap. Needless to say, 1 Division against 7 Armies would have been a tough one. But we served as a tripwire.

## **Bodo's Puppy Replacement**

I took our big German Shepherd, Bodo, with me when my National Guard unit, the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, was called to active duty in 1951. Bodo followed me everywhere, including the Commanding General's office. Bodo loved riding in an open jeep on training maneuvers. He also liked my pup tent and sleeping bag. Unfortunately, he was not allowed to go to Germany. After the Division arrived in Germany, my men gave me a German Shepard puppy to take Bodo's place. But, unlike our well trained



and obedient Bodo, this puppy wasn't house broken or trained. So, I sadly had to give him back.

### **“My, that man looks familiar!”**

While I was stationed in Germany in 1951, my wife and two children lived in The Hotel Hecht in St. Gallen Switzerland. We did not trust the Russians or East Germans not to invade West Germany to take advantage of American preoccupation with the



Korean War. I did not get many passes to go visit them, but when I did, I had to change out of uniform in a bathroom or telephone booth between the borders, because I was required to be in uniform in Germany, but the Swiss considered a foreign uniform to be an invasion.

One evening while my wife and children ate dinner in the top floor restaurant in the hotel, I showed up in

CPT Markle

a jacket and tie and stood in the doorway looking around. My wife noticed someone at the dining room entrance and exclaimed, “My, that man looks familiar!” My son, Cappy, glad to see me, hollered “Daddy!”

Frances had not recognized me after 8 years of marriage, since I was out of uniform!

### **AM III Gear and Maps Given to 1<sup>st</sup> City Troop**

I gave some items from my war days to the Philadelphia 1<sup>st</sup> City Troop. They included:

My custom-made leather Map Carrying Case, my complete Map Collection from Normandy through Central Europe to VE Day of 1:100,000 large scale maps used for travel and reconnaissance annotated for 5 Campaigns, all in a wooden box.



Some uniforms including, my Old Army uniform with britches, brown leather Dehner field boots, and spurs.

### **32 Moves in 8 years**

While I went wherever the Army sent me, my wife and family made many moves to be near me when possible, as I've mentioned in some of the stories above. When Frances couldn't, she'd stay with her parents in Pittsburgh, PA or Pinehurst, NC. All told in the 8 years between our marriage and our first home in the Philadelphia area on Henley Road in Overbrook Hills, PA, she and the children moved a total of 32 times, including once to Switzerland.

### **Awarded Legion of Honor**

On Tuesday, March 4, 2015 at the Embassy of France in Washington, DC, I was made a Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur in an impressive ceremony with about two dozen WWII veterans. Attending were my wife, Carolyn, my son, Alvan (Cappy) Markle IV and his wife, Anne, and our good friends the Archawskis, Jean-Loup and Michelle.

The certificate reads in part: "You have been named a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, as a sign of the gratitude for your personal contribution to the liberation of our country during World War II." The handsome medal was presented by Oliver Serot Almeres, Consul General of France in the name of the President of the French Republic.

### **Post Traumatic Stress**

The memories of some of the dreadful experiences described above were so powerful that I obsessed on them. They took over my mind. At times, I could think of nothing but these horrors. This was then called Combat Fatigue, and no cure was known. Nothing helped but time and duty. I remained functional. This is now known as Post Traumatic Stress and is treatable.

## Chapter 20 Conclusion

It was necessary to fight World War II to preserve the liberty and values of our people, and those of other free nations from the control of Fascist Dictators who sought to dominate the entire world. This raises an important question “How could Germany with unmatched education per head and great technical skills, as well as Italy with its fine cultural heritage, perpetrate the war crimes I saw and of which they were found guilty?” I believe the answer is that any country, including the United States, could become a rogue nation if it allowed its worst elements to take control of its government. We must never take our freedom for granted. Eternal vigilance is essential to keeping liberty and justice for all.

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## Appendix #1 CPT Markle's Timeline

### April 1944

- 13 Left Fort Bragg
- 14 arr Fort Slocum
- 18 Boarded Queen Elizabeth
- 28 Landed Grenoch, Scotland
- 29 Arrived Canford Cliffs

### June

- 06 D-Day
- 28 Arrived marshalling area vicinity, South Hampton

### July

- 04 Left Southampton
- 05 Landed Omaha Beach, Normandy
- 06 to Bivouac vicinity, LaCambe, France
- 12 to Bivouac vicinity, Cantipie, France
- 16 Firing position vicinity, La Smellerie, (St Andre deBohun)
- 24-25 Saturation Bombing (Operation Cobra)
- 28 Breakout at St. Lo and 266th FA Bn Moved Out
- 31. Moved to St. Jean de Savigney, Bivouac

### August

- 03 Moved to St. Gilles, Bivouac
- 06 to Landelles et Coupigny
- 14 to Sourdeval
- 15 to La Mesure
- 16 to Domfront Bivouac
- 17 to Pre en Pail Bivouac
- 20 to Senonches Forest Bivouac
- 28 Red Ball Express created from all 1st Army Units
- 31 to Versailles Bivouac

### September

- 05 Aid Military Police Operation to recapture German POWs
- 10 to Wallers Trelon, France Bivouac
- 13 to Walhorn, Belgium
- 18 to Breinig, Germany C Btry

### October

- 12 Markle, Comm. O to CO Battery C

### November

- 21 Lt. Ralph C Heiner joined C Battery

### December

- 04 Huertgen, Germany. 105mm German Howitzers
- 11 Dewey E. Waldrop wounded
- 26 to Stolberg, Bivouac
- 27 to Durbuy, Belgium. Ardennes Campaign

### January 1945

- 01 to Fays, Belgium

- 11 to Malempre, Belgium
- 14 to Joubieval, Belgium
- 26 to Outreroache, Belgium (Robertville)
- 29 Awarded Croix de Guerre avec Étoile Vermeil
- February
  - 02 to Kalterherberg, Germany
  - 05 Lt. Harold McDaniel joined
  - 07 to Weissweiler, Germany
  - 26 to Gurzenich, Germany (Bivouac)
  - 27 cross Roer to Bivouac Sutarderhof
  - 28 to Heppendorf, Germany
- March
  - 01 fired on Cologne Bridge
  - 05 to Pulheim
  - 10 to Delhoven (vic. Dusseldorf)
  - 16 to Leissem (vic. Bad Godesberg)
  - 25 to Bonn Bivouac
  - 27 cross Rhine at Remagen to Hassenboseroth
- April
  - 03 Rudersdorf Bivouac
  - 04 to Dermeach (Concordia Coal Mine)
  - 10 to Langenholdinghausen Bivouac
  - 12 to Wegeringhausen Bivouac
  - 13 to Feldmannshaus
  - 14 captured 204 EM+ 20 Officers. Fired last rounds
  - 15 received Croix de Guerre
  - 20 moved to Bivouac vicinity Frankenberg
  - 24 to containments vicinity Viermunden,  
Hotel Blocher, Herzhausen On the Edersee
- May
  - 08 VE Day
- June
  - 10 Three days leave in UK
- July
  - 10 To Etain, Provost Marshall  
Under Fire 10 months +  
Exposed over 2 mos to bombing in England
- Sep.
  - 02 VJ Day
- Nov
  - 22 Indiantown Gap, PA Relieved from active duty
- Dec. 1950
  - 05 Called to active duty and served in Germany.
- July 1952
  - 14 Relieved from active duty

### Appendix #2 CPT Markle's Route Maps







